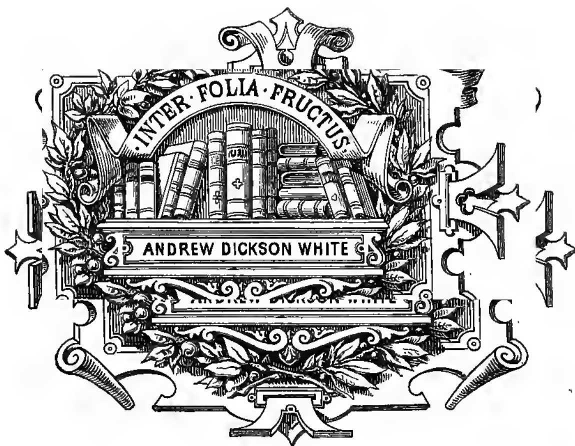
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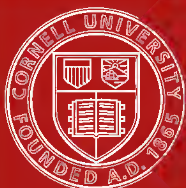

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A FREE LANCE

IN THE FIELD OF

LIFE AND LETTERS.

BY

WILLIAM CLEAVER WILKINSON.

And without letters what is life?—Erasmus.

NEW YORK:
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To my Father,

My first fruitful and my most fruitful teacher in the practice of English composition; and

To my Mother,

My earliest and my best example in strict literary conscience and long literary art,

This volume is affectionately inscribed by their grateful son,

The Author.

PREFACE.

THE title to this volume is not to be read in a belligerent sense. The chief emphasis rests not on the noun, but on the adjective. In short, it is a declaration of independence, and not a declaration of war. It claims its justification simply in that spirit of freedom from prescription and convention, in the exercise of which, as the author has pleased himself with believing, the essays were written.

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THE

LITERARY AND THE ETHICAL QUALITY

OF

GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS.

GEORGE ELIOT is more than a brilliant novelist. She is a great writer. She is more than simply a great writer. She is a prime elemental literary power. In literature such, she is scarcely less in ethics. She is a great ethical teacher—it may be not an original, but at least a highly charged derivative, moral living force. Perhaps even thus much is still too little to have said. For George Eliot seems already securely to belong to the very small number of those choice literary names which we jealously account our greatest. There have been admirable women in literary history whose chief praise justly was the exquisite womanliness of their genius. Mrs. Browning, when we succeed in forgetting her virile affectations, appears an illustrious example. There have been other admirable historic literary women who were strong distinctively as men are strong. Madame de Staël is, perhaps, an example. There is a third class, distinguishable in conception, composed of women whom we should honor, when we thought of them, in instinctively forgetting to remember their sex at all. Of these women we should not, on the one hand say, They carried the feminine quality to its height; nor yet, on the other, They transcended the limitations of their sex. We should simply say, Here were rare human souls, nobly endowed individuals of

the human race. We should at once exalt them to the glorious severity of comparison at large with whatever personages in literary history, male or female, might appear worthy to be reckoned their peers. In this third class, if there be such a class, belongs George Eliot. If there is no such class, then George Eliot stands alone in literary history, for she certainly is such a woman.

There is, therefore, no question remaining to be raised respecting George Eliot's intellectual rank. That point is settled already, as well as a like point ever was settled concerning any author during his lifetime. To determine, however, not the quantity, but the quality, not the degree, but the kind, of her power in letters and in morals, is a problem upon which something, perhaps, may still profitably be said. Indeed, an inquiry, carefully and candidly conducted, into the quality of George Eliot's influence as a novelist, ought, it seems to me, at this time, alike on literary and on ethical grounds, to enlist the serious attention of a wide circle of readers. This inquiry may properly enough be limited to her influence as a novelist, for the reason that although she has done noteworthy work as a poet, it is through her novels chiefly, or through her poems as novels, that she has hitherto wrought upon the taste and the conscience of her age.

The present inquiry will seek to be strictly impersonal—that is to say, there will be no attempt to import an irrelevant interest into this paper, by any allusions, open or covert, to the circumstances of George Eliot's personal history. The books that she has written shall be judged, as far as is possible, with no more influence admitted from the character, alleged or actual, of the writer, than if, instead of being a woman's productions, they were the foundling progeny of Dame Nature herself.

"Adam Bede" was the first work of the author that attracted wide public attention. This was published in 1858. Inseparably water-lined into its literary texture was a certain element not literary, well calculated to raise among religious readers of the book two quite different opinions of its quality. One can, in fact, easily imagine that its early fortune in this respect may have been, in some degree, like what afterward befell "Ecce Homo," when that stumbling-block to the theologians was first given to the world. There must, on the one hand, we should say, have been religious readers not a few to welcome "Adam Bede" as they had previously welcomed "The Wide, Wide World," as they subsequently welcomed "The Schönberg-Cotta Family." Such readers would see in it gospel enough — gospel pure, and sweet, and orthodox—to fit it for a place in the Sunday-school library, or for circulation by the evangelical propaganda. On the other hand, a different class of religious readers must as naturally have thought that they discovered a quite predominant literary and artistic interest in the author's conduct of her story, which separated her, in her own individual sympathy, from the exquisitely represented religious spirit of some of her principal characters. These less credulous readers would accordingly stand a little in doubt of their author. Freely acknowledging that the sanctities of the personal religious experience were always treated by her with the most decorous respect—unable to deny that at times this respect passed over into even the most seductively seeming-sympathetic homage and awe—they would have their misgiving nevertheless. They would seem to themselves to perceive that this writer, after all, was mainly intent on what, if they could have anticipated her subsequent diction, they might, perhaps—applying her favorite word—have called an "egoistic" aim of her own.

She meant to make the "holy secrets" of the Christian consciousness subserve, if not an irreverent, at least an inferior and a personal purpose. She would weave them into her design, for help to character and dialogue and plot. They should minister to an artistic, more than to any religious motive. Beyond this, her novel seemed to contain an undisclosed, but discoverable, implication, somewhat discomposing to the simply believing mind, that the author, on her own part, regarded the mystery of the life of God in the human soul from another than the obvious evangelical point of view. To her, apparently, this was but one element among many of an exceedingly complex human psychology, in which any other element whatever was divine and supernatural in quite the same sense as that.

It is curious, in the light of present knowledge, to glance from one to another among the chief periodicals of that day, and note the various conjectures hazarded by the puzzled, but admiring, reviewers as to the true theological position of the then unknown author of "Scenes of Clerical Life" and "Adam Bede." The "Westminster Review" must, of course, have been in her secret, but that quarterly affected to be as ignorant as its compeers, and after rehearsing opinions that assigned her to different theological parties from the Evangelical to the Broad Church, astutely ventured, for itself, to guess that George Eliot, while no doubt sincerely and deeply religious, was, probably, not the adherent of any one of the recognized creeds, being rather, it believed, of that liberal comprehension in faith which embraced whatever was true in them all.

One thing, however, at least was plain to every reader of discernment. We had here a new writer who was master, absolute master, of a style of extraordinary beauty and power. Choice English, limpid phrase,

charming simplicity, marvelous answerableness to the shifting mood, whether of thought or of feeling, the finished and assured repose of self-conscious art—art self-conscious but not self-complacent—these traits made up a style fitted in a wonderful degree to be the mirror to the world of a large soul, if, as could hardly fail to be the case, the owner of such a style turned out to have a large soul. Just what might be the inner truth of this writer's private relation to religion was, of course, matter of the purest impertinence to her literary claims. To the zealous religionist indeed it made a great difference whether one who evidently had so much power was going to wield her power for religion or against it. But the candid literary critic had only one possible interest in even entertaining a question like this. It might affect somewhat his estimate of her genius, if he could decide whether her aim in dealing with the problems of religious experience was the aim of an advocate, friendly or hostile, or merely the aim of an artist instead. This, I say, was the sole alternative that could tempt the literary critic to undertake a solution of the doubt.

"Adam Bede" itself contained evidence enough to satisfy the justly suspicious but unprejudiced literary mind what was the true state of the facts. To such a mind it was sufficiently clear that the writer of "Adam Bede" had had the penetration to perceive that the phenomena of religious experience in human hearts presented a vein of material for the novelist which no novelist had yet turned to any adequate account. Either as being herself, through the conditions of her own situation in life, exceptionally well qualified to work this vein, or, it might be, as possessing unconsciously a certain Shakespearean capacity of universal knowledge without universal experience, George Eliot had intro-

duced the religious element into her novel because, apart from its inherent attractions for the moral earnestness that was natural to her, she felt the artist's instinct of its adaptedness to help her produce her effects. It was further clear that she had the genuine artist's conscience to be judicially fair, or else, what served as well, the genuine artist's tact to be effectively faithful in her use of her religious material. Her reproduction of the Christian religious experience, as far, at least, as respected its forms of outward expression—and farther, of course, was impossible—wanted nothing of being exquisitely true to the rarest reality. The most mystically-minded evangelical Christian might find his finest moods of devotion reflected in the prayers and the discourses and the conversations of Dinah, the lovely Methodist woman preacher, who is the real heroine of "Adam Bede." Nothing, not divinely inspired, in history or in fiction, could well surpass the sweet, the heavenly beauty of Dinah's life. But side by side with this beautiful life, a life wholesomely and not morbidly beautiful, represented as believed by the liver of it to be a life drawn directly from a hidden spring in the heart of Christ, yet so represented in such a way that the writer is not once committed outright as either adhering or not adhering herself to that transcendent belief—side by side with a life like this, nay, in immediate contact with it day after day, without being affected by it, a life how different—Lisbeth's—an utterly sordid, earth-bound, carnal life, goes on, in the undisturbedly complacent portraiture of the impartial author, who never forgets the artist in the fellow-being to betray the slightest vicarious moral concern that a human soul should thus prove unheedful, and miss to know the day of its heavenly visitation. It is not that this contrast is not true to the occurrences of actual life. It is that no yearning emotion, no Pauline

travail of spirit, is elicited from the writer in witnessing the tragedy that she creates. There is, perhaps, manifest a certain tender relenting on her part—a gentle, half-stoical despair that relieves itself with a laugh of Democritus. What lacks is the mother-anguish of that distinctively Christian sorrow which weeps because it would have saved. In short, with respect to the fortunes of the life beyond life, not Shakespeare himself could be more supremely neutral, not the Epicurean Jove more serenely indifferent, as a creator administering for the beings of his creation.

Such is the conclusion at which the thoughtful student of "Adam Bede," taking the purely critical literary point of view, might easily arrive. But before "Adam Bede" appeared, its author had furnished to the critic other means for learning her motive and method. She had published in "Blackwood's Magazine" a series of sketches afterwards collected under the common descriptive title of "Scenes of Clerical Life." These pieces seem now, viewed in the retrospect, to bear somewhat the character of studies for her later more serious productions. With greater propriety, perhaps, they might be regarded as short essays in a kind of composition as to which it was more needful to the writer to try the taste of the public than it was to try her own powers. For the first sketch, "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton," exhibits almost as much assured and tranquil sense of mastery, on the part of the author, in mere style of composition and method of development, as is exhibited in "Middlemarch." There is even more repose of style in the earlier than in the later production. Hardly till "Middlemarch" would George Eliot have written, for example, this sentence: "Has any one ever pinched into its *pilulous* smallness the cobweb of pre-matrimo-

nial acquaintanceship?" ("Middlemarch," vol. i, p. 26, Harper's Ed.) A shrewd question, with pregnant implication—but not quite comfortably expressed. The ambition of high achievement seems to have been a subsequent growth with George Eliot. The trophies of George Eliot who had written, it was, perhaps, each time, that would not let George Eliot that was writing sleep. "Scenes of Clerical Life," are, in fact, so quiet in tone that their quietness comes near being a mannerism. They are intensely realistic pictures of perfectly commonplace life and character. The style of the composition is admirable. It is admirable enough to make these sketches well worth reading for the sake of the style alone. But it is so completely admirable that it scarcely of itself attracts any attention at all. It is only the writer practised enough to know, from experience of his own, how far off from the beginning of effort the end of effort is, in the attainment of such a style, that will bethink himself to notice the exquisite perfection of these pieces as mere composition.

The chief merit, however, of these pieces was not the finish of their style. They possessed the equally unique and perhaps graver merit of being a revelation to most people of the more than dramatic interest of humor and of pathos lying hidden under the common and every-day life that their neighbors are living around them. The traits of shrewd observation and of wise reflection that these "Scenes" exhibited might well, even in that early phase of the author's crescent fame, embolden one of the great British quarterlies in a review perhaps it was of "Adam Bede," to apply that almost awful epithet of supreme literary ascription, "Shakespearean." The felicity of expression, too, always corresponded. You read, and you smile, as you read, with pure pleasure of intellectual recognition,

coming again and again upon a trait of human character or conduct so exquisitely fitted with its happy phrase that it is like what you can imagine it might be if, by some magical good fortune, you had chanced upon a treasure-trove of a few original types of nature, easily perfect at once, and with no trace of any workmanship whatever upon them. How much character, for instance, is unfolded with a stroke of the pen when of a certain "thin woman with a chron c liver-complaint," at a tea-party, it is quietly said: "She has brought her knitting—no frivolous fancy knitting, but a substantial woollen stocking; the click-click of her knitting needles is the running accompaniment to all her conversation; and *in her utmost enjoyment of spoiling a friend's self-satisfaction, she was never known to spoil a stocking*." Again: "Mrs. Patten does not admire this excessive click-clicking activity. Quiescence in an easy-chair, under the sense of compound interest perpetually accumulating, has long seemed an ample function to her, *and she does her malevolence gently*." * * * * * She cherishes "a quiet *blood-relation's hatred* for her niece, Janet Gibbs, who, she knows, expects a large legacy, and whom she is determined to disappoint. Her money shall all go in a lump to a distant relation of her husband's, and Janet shall be saved the trouble of pretending to cry, by finding that she is left with a miserable pittance." A man-servant does double duty as groom and as table-waiter at the house of a certain gentleman whose sister, living with him, had inherited title without estate from a deceased Polish count, her husband, but nevertheless aspired to some style in her house-keeping: "John" is represented as "removing the tea things from the drawing-room, and brushing the crumbs from the table-cloth *with an accompanying hiss*, such as he was wont

to encourage himself with in rubbing down Mr. Bridmain's horse."

The members of a clerical party are described: "At Mr. Ely's right hand you see a very small man with a sallow and somewhat puffy face, whose hair is brushed straight up, evidently with the intention of giving him a height somewhat less disproportionate to his sense of his own importance than the measure of five feet three accorded to him by an oversight of nature." The Rev. Amos himself was "very full of plans which were something like his moves in chess—admirably well calculated, *supposing the state of the case were otherwise.*"

One feels, of course, how inadequate an impression of the fertile observation, the pregnant insight, with which these pages abound, any such excerpts torn from their relief in the context must necessarily make. A volume was recently published in England (it has since been re-published, with additions for "Middlemarch," in this country) entitled "Wit and Wisdom of George Eliot." It is a remarkable monument to the manifold fecundity, and to the invulnerable vitality no less, of her genius. But shreds from the woof ill represent a finished and continuous fabric of the loom. It is the exquisite fitness of the sentiment to the situation or to the character,—say, rather, to the character in the situation,—that gives to George Eliot's exuberant, though never too exuberant, wit and wisdom their consummate value and effect. She loves to be sententious. She is fonder of reflection than she is of narration. Her plot is for the sake of her dialogue, her dialogue is for the sake of her character, and her character is for the sake of the wit and the wisdom that her many-sided genius is consciously capable and therefore desirous of lavishing on the world. This statement needs some qualifi-

cation, for her dialogue now and again runs on, self-moved by its delight in its own conscious felicity. But it is approximately true. Her natural bent is about equally dramatic and ethical. She experiences a great delight in mere life-like exhibition of character. In so far she is purely dramatic. But she experiences fully as great a delight in subsequent interpretative comment and reflection on the character that she exhibits. In this she goes beyond what is dramatic and becomes ethical or else psychological. The ethical seems, perhaps, to engage her most deeply.

This was more certainly and more constantly true in her earlier than it has been in her later work. Not that she has ceased to betray an ethical interest in what she writes. This is far enough from being the case. But her ethical interest has grown somehow less practical and more theoretic. The pure artist used to have to compete with the moralist. Lately the artist's competition has been rather with the *doctrinaire*, or with the speculative psychologist. George Eliot from the first has been consistently and earnestly moral, or religious even, as those who claim her for a chief ornament of their philosophical school would probably say. It was not, therefore, as not earnestly moral, but only as not properly and purposely Christian, in the ordinary orthodox sense of that word, that "Adam Bede," a little way back, was meant to be characterized. There is an eager and intent moral earnestness in the book. But, notwithstanding certain ambiguous superficial appearances, the moral earnestness is not clearly and narrowly Christian. The quality of the moral earnestness that George Eliot exhibits, or, more strictly, the quality of the moral influence that she is likely to exert, is reserved for examination in the concluding portion of this paper.

The "Scenes of Clerical Life" contain the germs, or at least the promise, of a considerable part of all that is to be found in her maturer productions. Like these, though even in a greater degree, they depend for their interest on qualities in them separable, and in fact, separate, from the narrative which they incidentally contain. The narrative is both meagre and commonplace to a degree. The constructive, or rather the inventive, faculty might seem wanting to the author. Quite as probably, however, she set small value in comparison on the plot of her stories, feeling rather like a painter who should resolve to achieve his results, not by any masterly skill of composition, but by the endlessly minute Dutch life-likeness of his picture, and then by the fine interpretative light of sentiment that he would contrive to throw over the whole. George Eliot through all her novels has remained weakest in point of plot, although she has evidently paid far more attention of late to the construction of her stories. Whether this relative weakness in her performance is to be referred to inherent defect of invention in her genius, or rather to the predominating influence of the pure dramatic and the pure didactic faculty in it taken together, is, perhaps, open to question. The fact certainly is, that plot with her is everywhere subordinate to what may be termed the motive of the story, and incident is always fain to wait patiently on dialogue, while dialogue itself, the evident favorite diversion of George Eliot's genius, gives way full cheerfully to that which is her chief serious concern, the work of austere and subtle psychological analysis.

We thus recur to the element in George Eliot's novels which has always, upon the whole, constituted the leading motive of her work. Psychological analysis is her strength and her joy. She creates character, she de-

vises incident and situation, chiefly that she may have her occasion of indulging that almost superhuman faculty which is hers, of laying bare to its ultimate microscopic secret the anatomy of the living human consciousness in play. This motive in her work, is what gives to it its unity as a progressive development —it is the one germ which has steadily unfolded and grown from her first published writing to her last. Her novels are pre-eminently psychological novels. The psychological element contributes the greatest proportion of the whole bulk of her volumes. There is a good deal of landscape, and there are frequent bits of brilliant meteorology. These parts, by the way, are done with delicious felicity of descriptive words, so that as mere verbal effects they are a perpetual delight. The features of a landscape, however, are seldom, if ever, photographed, as with a single sudden stroke of the sun, on the reader's imagination. A radiant haze of words is hung between your eyes and the scene. A little idealism of the right sort seems so much better here than any amount of the most conscientious realism. It is doubtful, perhaps, whether George Eliot possesses just the necessary kind of imagination for this poet's-purpose. But it might easily surprise a reader of her books that had never before directed his attention to the point, to observe how large a proportion of the space occupied with the liveliest conversation, or with the most exciting incident, is usurped by the author for her own interspersed interpretation and comment. The unique characteristic interest too of the dialogue and the narrative is to a wonderful extent, for even the cursory reader, lodged in these interruptions from the author in her delightful character of well-informed and astute individual chorus.

But George Eliot's novels could not be popular, as

they are, if, at the same time that they are thus prevailingly psychological, they were not also something else than psychological. She is often subtle and refined, and removed from obvious apprehension (in her sense—she is always perfectly plain in her expression) to a degree scarcely surpassed in the case of any professed psychologist or metaphysician in the world. But she has besides a broad zone of contact with the average human being that makes her, notwithstanding, as popular too as she is profound. Shakespeare's street conversations, for instance, of citizens No. 1, 2, and 3, on occasion of a popular commotion, are not more faithful to the vulgar life of the populace than are such remarks as these which follow, specimen fragments of surly humor, reported from individuals of the Florentine mob during the famine and plague in "Romola." Romola, in her stately womanhood, is ministering to Baldassarre, found in a dying condition on the street. Some starving fellows watch her with envy tempered with awe:

"'Do you keep your bread for those that can't swallow, madonna?' said a rough-looking fellow, in a red night-cap, who had elbowed his way into the inmost circle of spectators—a circle that was pressing rather closely on Romola.

"'If anybody isn't hungry,' said another, 'I say, let him alone. He's better off than people who've got craving stomachs and no breakfast.'

"'Yes, indeed; if a man's a mind to die, it's a time to encourage him, instead of making him come back to life against his will. Dead men want no trencher.'

* * * * * *

"'Come, madonna,' said he of the red cap, 'the old thief doesn't eat the bread, you see: you'd better try *us*. We fast so much we're half saints already.'

"* * Romola held out the basket of bread to the

man in the night-cap, looking at him without any reproach in her glance, as she said,

"'Hunger is hard to bear, I know, and you have the power to take this bread if you will. It was saved for sick women and children. You are strong men; but if you do not choose to suffer because you are strong, you have the power to take everything from the weak. You can take the bread from this basket; but I shall watch by this old man; I shall resist your taking the bread from *him*.'

"For a few moments there was perfect silence, while Romola looked at the faces before her, and held out the basket of bread. * * * The man in the night-cap looked rather silly, and backed, thrusting his elbow into his neighbor's ribs *with an air of moral rebuke*." ("Romola," pp. 334–5, Harper's Ed.)

It was impossible not to quote, in sequel to the remarks of the men in the crowd, so penetratively humorous a trait of observation in character as is contained in the clause distinguished above by italics. The very flesh and blood of universal human nature is in that exquisite stroke.

No doubt at bottom it is the same faculty of mind that makes one writer psychological in his method, and another writer dramatic. It is in either case a faculty for intuition of human nature—intuition, not observation alone, for the knowledge given by the faculty in question is an endowment and not an acquirement. It takes, to be sure, George Eliot's genius to observe as George Eliot observes. But then observation, even like hers, must often fail from lack of opportunity. For these times of failure there is intuition, if one only possesses it, not less infallible than observation itself. Such intuition George Eliot possesses. Perhaps if we sought to be entirely scientific, we should find this faculty of intu-

ition to be identical in essence with that power of the mind which mental philosophers have distinguished as the faculty of generalization.

But, notwithstanding the substantial sameness of the faculty in the two cases, how different a face of the same faculty is the dramatic from the psychological. The dramatic method *exhibits* human nature in action—the psychological *explains* the grounds and motives of the action. Evidently the dramatic is limited in its effects by the degree of responsive faculty for observation and appreciation possessed by the reader or the spectator. The dramatist can *exhibit* to you only so much as you are capable of perceiving. There is nothing in the dramatist's art to make you percipient and intelligent beyond your natural degree. His whole prosperity lies in the eye of his beholder. The psychological method, on the contrary, may disclose to you far more in an action than you would have been able to discover for yourself. The psychological method becomes thus the proper supplement of the dramatic. At the point where the dramatic of necessity fails the psychological may begin. This is the advantage of the novel over the drama. The drama can only be dramatic. But the novel may be as dramatic as the drama, and then go on to be as psychological as if it were not dramatic at all.

There is, of course, no implication here intended that the novel is a higher kind of literature than the drama. The question of precedence between the two is not raised. It is simply maintained that the novel, from its mixed character, as in turn dramatic, narrative, or reflective, at choice, has certain manifest advantages at specific points over the drama. This very mixedness of its character is probably a mark of its technical inferiority. But the novel may assuredly in consequence become more deeply and subtly psychological

than the drama. The drama is, of course, equally with the novel, bound to obey the laws of a sound psychology. In this sense of being psychological, there is no difference between the two. In the case of both alike, the action must proceed according to the truth of human nature. But the novel, more than the drama, is free to make its underlying psychology plain by exposition. The drama might, to be sure, conceivably employ the awkward expedient of adopting and adapting from the ancient Greek tragedy its chorus of solemn observers to interpret for us the psychology, in place of the ethics, of the action represented. In this way we might have in the drama unlimited psychological disquisition. But the drama thus modified would no longer be fit for popular representation. It would have to retire from the stage to the closet. In other words, it would, in just so far, have declined from the pure dramatic idea, and have become little distinguishable at this particular point, save in the incident of its formal construction, from the novel.

Now George Eliot within her range—and her range, though, unlike Shakespeare's, it may have definite determinable limits, is still very wide—George Eliot, I say, within her range is every whit as dramatic as Shakespeare. So natural is the dramatic method to her genius that her novels are often conceived in a succession of scenes, instead of in the continuity of narration. But when, ceasing for the moment to be dramatic, she uses the privilege of the novelist to be expressly psychological, her analysis of character and motive becomes so subtle and searching that mere dramatic exhibition seems almost vulgar in comparison. Hamlet's soliloquy is greatly admired for the depth and subtlety of psychological implication which it contains. But there is many and many a passage of clair-

voyant vision and revelation in the sphere of human character and motive to be found in George Eliot's works that makes Hamlet's soliloquy superficial and tame. George Eliot's knowledge in the deep things of the human heart, in short, is hardly second to anything elsewhere exhibited in the whole realm of literature. There are marks enough in her writing of varied and watchful observation. But the knowledge of the human heart that George Eliot displays is not an acquired knowledge. It was born with her and in her. It is genius. It is a gift which is Shakespearean in quality—one might, perhaps, as well be frankly true to himself and out with his thought—it is *finer* than Shakespeare. In quantity it is less, but in quality it is more.

Take as an instance of the advantage in point of fine psychological implication that the novel possesses over the drama, the qualifying clause, "*with an air of moral rebuke*," appended to the statement of fact that the fellow in the "red night-cap," falling back, on Romola's words, into the crowd, made way for himself by thrusting his elbows into his neighbor's ribs. Here the action is nothing compared with the manner of the action. But the manner of the action it is beyond the province of the dramatist to give. The dramatist has here to depend on histrionism to interpret his thought. Another instance is supplied in a powerfully conceived scene that occurs elsewhere in "Romola." Tito visits the hut in which his outraged adoptive father, Baldassarre, lies couched in his straw, awaiting the retarded hour of his vengeance. Tito has decided to ease his own mortgaged future by healing the immedicable breach between himself and Baldassarre. He will ask forgiveness for his unfilial desertion and resume the son's affectionate care of his father. Baldassarre greets

his visitor by making the abortive attempt on Tito's life with his dagger, but Tito persists. It is as yet uncertain how Baldassarre will receive the unanticipated overture. "Presently Baldassarre began to move. He threw away the broken dagger, and slowly and gradually, still trembling, began to raise himself from the ground. Tito put out his hand to help him, and so strangely quick are men's souls that in this moment, when he began to feel his atonement was accepted, *he had a darting thought of the irksome efforts it entailed*."[1] ("Romola," p. 279, Harper's Ed.) It would be hard for the dramatic method to enter so shrewdly as this into the almost sub-conscious movements of the human soul. An "aside" would not answer, for the thought does not take shape in words even in the thinker's mind.

But George Eliot is not simply a dramatist and a psychologist in her novels. She is a profound and various thinker as well. The thought which goes to the production of valuable literary work is of two sorts. There is the thought which has preceded, and there is, besides, the thought which immediately accompanies the conception and execution of the work. The one sort enriches the production through having enriched the producing mind; the other more directly enriches the production itself. The one sort is immanent thought, thought subsisting as condition; the other is active thought, thought working as cause. Or the difference might be likened to the difference between the elements contributed to existing life on the globe by those geologic ages which are finished and extinct,

[1] The words "began to" occurring here in each one of three consecutive sentences so short, present a trait of negligence in writing which, however venial, strikes me as decidedly unusual with George Eliot.

and the elements contributed by that age which is now current and still incomplete. Of both these sorts of thought George Eliot's novels are full. Her later and maturer productions presuppose an amount of arduous thinking on the hard and high problems of human existence that is nothing short of astonishing. It would not be easy to name any other writing in recent literature that, bulk for bulk, registers a greater quantity of good, fresh, deep, clear, sound, sincere, and honest antecedent thought. The "In Memoriam" is pre-eminently of such a character—that work is like the earth's thronged crust for the record of finished elemental processes and secular energies now in repose, that it enfolds. But George Eliot's novels are not inferior here to the "In Memoriam." The writer of these has swept as large a part of the great diapason of possible human intellectual experience as has the writer of that. The novels are inferior to the poem only in the form of expression which they give to the thought. In the form of expression they are inferior only as prose must be inferior to poetry—as even the most exquisite prose must still be inferior to poetry, if the poetry happens to be equally exquisite in its superior kind. George Eliot's prose is as nearly poetic as it ought to be—that is, as nearly poetic as it could be, and remain completely and homogeneously prose. Precisely the *differentia* of properly poetic expression George Eliot's genius seems not to have at command.[1]

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[1] I hardly escape the pain of self-reproach in denying the supreme gift of poetry to a writer who produces such lines as, for instance, these from "The Spanish Gipsy:"

> "Nay, never falter: no great deed is done
> By falterers who ask for certainty.
> No good is certain, but the steadfast mind,
> The undivided will to seek the good:
> 'Tis that compels the elements, and wrings

It is a great denial to her from nature. But perfect prose is as rare, if it is not quite so precious, as perfect poetry. Let George Eliot be content with her gift. It is a unique and high delight, second only to that supreme delight which poetry yields, to read page after

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A human music from the indifferent air.
The greatest gift the hero leaves his race
Is to have been a hero. Say we fail!—
We feed the high tradition of the world,
And leave our spirits in Zincalo breasts."

That is very noble verse. Something of a true Miltonic spirit throbs in it. "The steadfast mind, the undivided will to seek the good," might almost be from the mouth of Satan himself, turned moral. The whole strain is kindred in motive with strophe IX. of Mr. Lowell's magnificent "Commemoration Ode." That passage and this set in contrast and comparison, furnish a fine study of the diverse methods pursued respectively by writers, on the one hand that are essentially prose writers, and writers on the other hand that are essentially poets. George Eliot, according to her genius, had a perfectly palpable concrete thought to express. She refined it, she sublimated it, she did everything in short but *permanently change it from its proper native state as prose.* She found a solid. She purified it seven times, but she left it a solid. Mr. Lowell, on the contrary, with his different sense, found an impalpable, imponderable ether. His labor was to seize it and to hold it. There was no danger of his getting a precipitate for result. The danger was rather that the volatile quality of his object would be too much for him—that he should lose his over-expansile thought altogether. The process of the essential prose writer in writing verse is thus in some sort the precise opposite of that of the essential poet. The one seeks to etherealize—the other seeks to compress and contain. But certain it is that what does not come to you as poetry, you can never convert into poetry with all your pains.

As to the mottoes in verse to the chapters in "Middlemarch" bearing quotation marks which hint no doubt that they were borrowed from George Eliot herself, it may without disparagement be said of them, dense with thought and wisdom as they often are, they still contain many equivalents more of truth than of poetry.

Her recently published volume of collected pieces in verse is full of many noble intellectual and moral qualities—of speculation, of reflection, of feeling, of power—but of poetry—? One attributes an autobiographic interest to it in parts.

page, nay, volume after volume, of pure and homogeneous prose, undisturbed with any fear of occasion to abate one's complacency in the choiceness of the diction, in the absolute fitness of the phrase to the thought, in the linked, liquid articulation of clauses, in the rich, interwoven, harmonious order of the rhythm. This delight George Eliot bestows upon her readers beyond almost any other writer now living.

Besides the wealth of suggested antecedent thought with which George Eliot's novels are endowed, there is evident in them the presence also of an immense amount of coetaneous thinking. There is thought, the still result, and there is thinking, the fervid process. No writer is less disposed to be self-indulgent than George Eliot. She gives us her best all the time. Her slack moods, if she has such, she keeps. She applies a principle of severe rejection to everything below the standard. She thinks a thought thoroughly out, and then she spares herself no pains necessary fairly to express it. Her style has, accordingly, a vitality—let us employ the less usual Saxon term, the better to match the unusual fact—an intense *livingness* all its own. It is like a living organism, "vital in every part." The syntax tingles to its utmost particle with the fine vibration of an omnipresent life. To take away a word would be vivisection. The lacerated sentence would bleed. What incalculable quantities of costly brain vibration have gone into the tense and quivering pages of these books! But nothing has been lost. The force lives and is immortal. It communicates itself in quickened thought and feeling forever to the mind and heart of the race.

But behind the thought and the thinking in these novels there is a vast amount, too, of the power of passion. The brain has not wrought alone. The heart has wrought with it. The thought, indeed, is very often

of the sort that is always first in the sensibility. The brain has wrought because the heart moved it to work. The capacity of emotion on the part of their author, implied in George Eliot's novels, is prodigious. The marvel of the sensibility is as great as the marvel of the intellect. Not that George Eliot seems certainly to have lived in any painful sympathy with the various personages of her plots. On the contrary, there is nothing more remarkable in her demeanor than the perfectly wholesome alacrity and ease with which she turns from the most absorbing tragedy to pure comedy or broad farce, or even, a more difficult transition, to the neutral ground of mere humdrum commonplace life. This is much the same as to say that she is not a sentimentalist. Her passion is deeper than the sentiments. It bows itself against the pillars of the soul. It takes hold of the bases. It is elemental. It is no mere transient sympathy that relieves itself with ready tears over the sorrows of her fictive world. It is a part of the author's own personal experience. It is a real passion on account of the real woes of the real world. George Eliot appears to her readers "crowned with attributes of woe" almost (not quite) "like glories." It is evident that her life has not been "idle ore,"

> But iron dug from central gloom,
> And heated hot with burning fears,
> And dipt in baths of hissing tears,
> And batter'd with the shocks of doom.

The prevailing pathos of her books affects one with a tender personal sympathy for the author, as well as with that larger impersonal sympathy which it is evident she wishes and aims to inculcate, on behalf of the whole pitiable world of mankind. The irony in which she indulges is sometimes looked upon as cynicism. There

could hardly be a greater mistake. It is the sad smile that plays on the face of a rueful despair. Cynicism is earnestness soured by contempt. Thackeray,[1] who wielded a humorous sarcasm superficially similar to George Eliot's, was no more a cynic than is she. But Thackeray was saved from cynicism by lack of earnestness. George Eliot is saved from cynicism—more nobly —by the absence of contempt. She is seldom more sincerely humane, more yearningly tender, than when she is irradiating the gloom in which her philosophy seems to shroud the lot of men, with a beam, gentle, and but half-gladdening even to herself, of irony, like the "setting sun's pathetic light." Occasionally her irony takes on the humor of an angry indignation inspired by moral earnestness that is always noble, if it is not always wise. Perhaps it is possible of late to gather some just apprehension of a danger threatening the healthful poise of George Eliot's spirit at this point. It would be wonderful if her rest in herself, unsupported by rest in the only Unshaken Stay of human souls, should prove morally sufficient for her permanent intellectual health and peace. Symptoms of what may in the end turn out to be decline toward the cynical spirit are discoverable here and there in her latest productions—her latest production, perhaps it should be said.

Of the wide reading, the ripe culture, the various knowledge, which her works betoken in their author, it may be said that they would seem justly remarkable if these less personal, more separable characteristics were not held in such happy subordination to higher

[1] George Eliot, by the way, would perhaps be as willing to acknowledge a literary debt to Thackeray as to any one of her peers among novelists. Her faculty of observation, and her faculty of humorous expression as well, must, I should say, have been consciously or unconsciously trained in the school of the author of "Vanity Fair."

qualities as hardly to make a distinct impression for themselves. Only once in a while, in "Middlemarch," does her learning appear a little over-forward to announce itself. Even in these instances the reader may impute what did not belong to the writer. For example: "Signs are small measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a sky, and *colored by a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge.*" ("Middlemarch," vol. I., p. 29, Harper's Ed.) The sense here is like George Eliot, fine and striking and true; but the word "sky" acted as a spell upon her memory and she recalled the latest science on the subject. Her imagination, however, was not quite equal to the task of making the science happily and helpfully available. At least so it seems to one—doubtfully. For after all it is "vastness," and not "color," which the "wonder, hope, belief," give to the sky, in George Eliot's conception. And it is the "knowledge," and not the "idealization," which acts as Prof. Tyndall's "scattering" medium to break the whiteness of the light into color. But it is so much more instinctive to imagine one's knowledge colored by one's wishes, than to imagine one's wishes colored by one's knowledge, that the new turn continues to have too much the air of effort. It may justify itself to the understanding, but to the imagination it is a stumbling-block. For another example: "In short, woman was a problem which, since Mr. Brooke's mind felt blank before it, could be hardly less complicated *than the revolutions of an irregular solid.*" When, as in "Middlemarch," not often, but too often, we are obliged to feel that conscious effort has taken the place of unconscious energy, we then first begin to remark that the writer's power is not

quite boundless—the idea of limit and definition is suggested. In general, however, it has to be conceded, George Eliot's accomplishments are well content to be the unobtrusive if not unapparent conditions of her power.

A further trait of George Eliot's style, as salient and as characteristic as any, is her humor. Humor sometimes, and sometimes wit, it is natural to call that vivacious play of her genius, which is the accompanying grateful relief and recreation to its more prevailing sad and serious mood. The effect of this faculty for seeing things on their ludicrous side is almost omnipresent in her writings. It is a constant leavening element to aërate and quicken what, without it, would often be somewhat tedious, however wise and weighty, moral or social disquisition. It lightens and brightens the long pages which it is a peculiarity of her method to occupy with elaborate preliminary accounts of personages introduced, or of states of society conditioning her story. But for this enlivenment her stages of preparation for the tardy development of plot would be quite too serious reading for most persons.

The compass of her humor is very great. Often it is so fine, so exquisite, as to be absolutely elusive, except to a sense not only delicate by nature, but prepared beforehand, by knowledge of her habit, to be alert and suspicious. Then, again, it is broad and substantial enough to appeal to the least ethereal appreciation. To give by instances any adequate notion of its abundance, its piquancy, and its variety, would be out of the question. One might quote almost at random whole pages, and even whole chapters. Incidentally the absurdity of classical education for a boy with no taste and no aptitude for it, engages her satire, at one point, in "The Mill on the Floss." (We seem here to

conjecture an influence from her patron and friend, the coryphæus of the New Education, so-called. But Herbert Spencer, for all that he knows so well the philosophy of style as a theory, has never in his practice equalled the Damascene temper and edge of the weapon that is wielded by his pupil.) "I only know," George Eliot remarks, "it turned out as uncomfortably for Tom Tulliver as if he had been plied with cheese in order to remedy a gastric weakness which prevented him from digesting it." (P. 125, Harper's Ed.) The most ardent classicist can afford to smile at this, and admit besides that, for the case to which it applies, it is demonstration.

Some of George Eliot's characters are of humor all compact. Mrs. Poyser, in "Adam Bede," is likely to enjoy an immortality of fame. She is as substantive a creation as Falstaff. Her wisdom is almost always wit. Her wise saws, pungent with Attic salt, flow from her with every collision like a stream of sparks from steel held hard on a whirling emery-wheel. Chapter XXXII. in "Adam Bede," entitled "Mrs. Poyser has her say out," affords a good specimen of her quality. It is jocund with delight in consciously effective wagging of the tongue. Mrs. Poyser, by the way, could hardly in her time have known anything of the "brimstone match," which, nevertheless, is made to supply her with an odorous and odious comparison to the Squire's disadvantage. As a rule, George Eliot is very careful and scholarly in her historical settings. Her success with Mrs. Poyser in this interview seems to have induced her to repeat the experiment in "Middlemarch," where a duplicate of the original scene occurs. One would not willingly spare either of these scenes, but they resemble each other enough to suggest a sense of that limitation in the opulence of George

Eliot's genius, which, as before hinted, is the point of her most noticeable inferiority to Shakespeare. So "Bob" in "The Mill on the Floss" is something like a study for Bratti in "Romola." Bratti, however, is a vast improvement on Bob, and is, by the way, a highly stimulating encounter. (And it is remarkable that we are not forced to perceive much difference of facility in the author for the personation of the female over the male humorist.) It would be easy to mention other examples of virtual repetition occurring in the series of these novels. Such repetition seems to imply a limitation to the fecundity of the author's invention. But this implication is not a necessary one. And the lavish profusion with which she sometimes gratuitously creates perfectly individualized characters (take for instances her pauper audience in "Rev. Amos Barton," and her Featherstone mourners in "Middlemarch"), as it were for the mere wanton joy that she experiences in the exercise of her creative power, should, perhaps, be accepted for proof that her repetitions of herself are accidental, or nobly careless, and not symptomatic of poverty. In general, too, her novels are extremely populous with characters, substantially conceived and sharply discriminated characters, quite as if the author were not at all straitened in her sense of ample resources at command. It is purely incidental, and by no means a trait of her method, when, as in the case of Mr. Brooke in "Middlemarch," she seizes some chance habit of a personage to label him for the recognition of the reader. This cheap trick of characterization is entirely alien from the high-toned and conscientious style of George Eliot's workmanship. Mr. Charles Dickens is entitled to remain undisturbed in his renown as the triumphant "Cheap John" of this ticketing method in literary haberdashery. Commonplaceness is a fault into which

it would be impossible for George Eliot to lapse. For, however often she might present a familiar thought, she would be sure to affect it with some novelty derived from the vigor of her conception and the consequent freshness of her mode of expressing it. And still it does happen in a few instances that she uses stock expedients for developing her plots, and in one notable instance, the trick practiced with the monkey on the quack doctor, in "Romola," she condescends to give classical form to a story which it required some temerity to take from its natural popular currency and stamp with a superscription of her own. But then we should quite misinterpret George Eliot if we admitted these things to modify, in any appreciable degree, our estimate of her genius. These things do not belong to the sphere of effort where she expends her strength. The plot and incident of her stories are the mere moulds into which she casts her sentiment or her humor. She sets no value on them in themselves. You might destroy the entire framework of plot which sustains the structure of her novels, and the true transcendent value of her work would remain unimpaired. This is not saying that greater technical skill in formal construction would not enhance her claim to admiration. It certainly would. But, on the other hand, her deficiency here is not in the nature of a deduction to be made from her merit. For although she has chosen the novel for her vehicle, it is not as a novelist strictly that she is to be judged. The form of her work is subordinate, and, as it were, accidental. It is the content of her work — the character, the dialogue, the humor, the pathos, the thought, contained in it—that must fix our estimate of her success.

For this reason it is not much to the purpose to criticise George Eliot's books as novels. Submitted to

technical tests they would be found wanting at many points. In short, you could easily, by a destructive process of criticism, eliminate from these novels, one after another, the several merits on which novels in general depend for their popularity, until scarcely a single ordinary element of success with readers would seem to remain. But the life of thought and of feeling, and the exquisite organ of speech that they use, would remain, and these would still suffice, as they have sufficed, to make George Eliot, in spite of technical faults, a popular novelist. "Romola" is perhaps, upon the whole, the most satisfactory among her books, considered purely as a novel. It is, likewise, as highly wrought as any in point of style. Compared with the rest, it is inferior only to "Middlemarch" in the weight and value of its thought and of its moral inculcation. It has besides, beyond any other, claims to the dignity of being an historical novel. But its history, although admirably studied, is not wrought into any vital organic relation with the story. Savonarola is a stately and gracious figure in it, strikingly presented, but, except in that one encounter of his with Romola on her first flight from Tito, the action might easily have dispensed with him. Tito, by the way, hardly gets the poetic justice done him at last that the long suspended development of his doom has been leading us to expect on his behalf. He has his will of life as far as to the end, and at the end he escapes the catastrophe that he would most have dreaded,—conscious exposure to scorn,—and dies a quick death. Poor Baldassarre—he gets his revenge, but the sweetness of revenge he loses. Tessa is really a quite inconceivably silly and insipid case of the perpetuated baby. But what do things like these signify weighed against the extraordinary wealth of learning, of wit, of humor, of wisdom, of passion, of

thought, of psychological insight, of prophetic moral teaching, conveyed in full "answerable style," that "Romola" contains?

Each successive book of George Eliot is more densely thoughtful than its predecessor. It is as if the weight of all that go before were a superincumbent mass pressing the one that follows into still compacter form. "Middlemarch" accordingly, both absolutely and in proportion to its bulk, compresses more thought into its limits than does any other one of her books. It is, no doubt, considered as a novel, vastly over-freighted with thought. Technically this is, of course, a fault. But what a fault! "Middlemarch" certainly is not easy reading. It is, indeed, a wonderful triumph that it should find readers at all. The beginning of it is so slow as to its action, and the embarrassment in it of intellectual riches is so great that it is difficult to understand how it should entangle the average reader in interest enough to keep him reading. But the catastrophe, or the catastrophes—how they gain in power from the retarded progress with which thus they are approached!

But what has already been said must suffice for appreciation of the literary quality of these remarkable books. We come now to the more serious part of our task—an attempt to appreciate the moral or ethical quality of George Eliot's novels.

In the first place we must begin by maintaining, without reserve and without qualification, that, as to purpose on the part of the author, the moral quality of these novels is not only beyond criticism,—the criticism of censure,—but almost beyond praise. The moral motive that animates George Eliot's genius seems to me to be wholly pure and noble. She is complained of, not without some reason, for clinging

too closely to the hard, the unredeemed realities of life in her narrative, and her delineation of character. She is, indeed, here a realist, in the extremest sense of that word—no, we must not say the extremest, for there is a sense of the word that puts a writer conforming to it outside the pale of true artists and makes him, while remaining it may be faithful to fact, still—we lack a single term to express it—somehow crude, gross, offensive to cultivated taste, destitute, in short, of *tone*. George Eliot, then, let us say, is realistic in the extremest sense that is strictly consistent with art. A true artist she is, but she will not idealize. We miss in her representations of human life precisely the light that *never was* on sea or land. The light in her novels is still the light that is, and that always was, and that always will be. If this is praise, it is her just praise. If it is derogation, so much must justly be derogated.

But when we turn from considering her novels as pictures of life to considering them as intimations of her own moral standard, and of the didactic moral aim that inspires her work, we find a very great difference. The morality of these novels, if we regard the conscious intention of the author alone, is quite ideal enough. The morality of them may, or may not be, practically safe and wise. But, at least, it is never low. The highest sentiments of devotion to conscience and to truth, implied inculcations of the most magnanimous, the most costly self-sacrifice, abound. "Egoism" —this word is her substitute for the too polarized term *selfishness* (the polarization, the same polarization, would inevitably soon be transferred from the original to the substitute)—"egoism" is to be sternly repressed—it is to be brought to the altar of sacrifice. In the dialect of a school, she preaches "altruism," in antithesis to

"egoism," that is, devotion to others, in exclusion of devotion to self.

I accordingly find it impossible to understand those critics who consider George Eliot's novels immoral in anything like the ordinary sense of immorality. I find it, also, equally impossible to sympathize with those critics who have lately pronounced "Middlemarch" a cold book. To me it is warm and pulsing with the life-blood of a most loving human heart. The great act of Dorothea in paying her visit to Rosamond to counsel and comfort her, and to save Lydgate, at the very moment when her own life seemed to have been left to her desolate—I confess that it affects me as a stroke of pathos hardly less than sublime. This is the true climax of the interest of the novel. And it is worth noting that the climax is a moral climax.

> Tears from the depth of some divine despair—

a despair just then smitten with hope, since such goodness lives—start at this incident to rightly reading eyes like the waters from the rock springing at the touch of Moses' rod. Certainly George Eliot is no maudlin sentimentalist—no melodramatic emotion-monger like him of "Little Nell." But for high and pure pathos, —pathos conceived in the key of that magnanimity which, in a world like ours, fallen and in sore need of redemption, is always the highest and purest pathos,—I should scarcely know where to look for anything finer than "Middlemarch" supplies.

This is by no means to be regarded in the light of concession to George Eliot. It is hearty, ungrudged, and grateful ascription. She is a writer of great and generous moral aims. It is her worthy ambition to breathe, if she may, into the hearts of men and women, —her brothers and sisters,—an ampler breath of moral

inspiration. She would fain do something toward releasing us all from our pettiness, our selfishness, our falseness, our convention. Her psalm of life lacks sadly the anticipative triumph, but it has all the moral elevation, of that strain in "The Two Voices:"

> Waiting to strive a happy strife,
> To war with falsehood to the knife,
> And not to lose the good of life—
>
> Some hidden principle to move,
> To put together, part and prove,
> And mete the bounds of hate and love—
>
> As far as might be, to carve out
> Free space for every human doubt,
> That the whole mind might orb about—
>
> To search thro' all I felt or saw,
> The springs of life, the depths of awe,
> And reach the law within the law.

Such I find to be the moral *spirit* of George Eliot's novels. The moral *tendency* of them is a different matter.

The moral spirit of George Eliot's novels—their intentional influence—makes one way. It is favorable to nobleness, goodness, virtue. The tendency of them, their undesigned influence, makes another way. Not wholly by any means, for happily mere integrity of purpose is itself a force in morals that no falseness of fundamental principle can entirely countervail; not wholly, therefore, but in just so far as tendency is separable from spirit in writing, the tendency is contrary to the spirit in George Eliot's novels. She unconsciously hinders the nobleness that she inculcates. Let me explain.

One of the leading ideas in her novels is fate—fate in the twofold form of outward and inward necessity.

The universe is hard, unyielding, compelling; character is given, fixed, unchangeable. Not that character is, according to her, a finished result from the first. It is rather a process indeed. But it is process under immutable law. Character changes, but it changes according to an unchangeable necessity incorporate in its own original constitution. It was always that in germ which at any moment it has become in development. In this sense, it is not too much to say, and to say again, human character in George Eliot's philosophy is given, fixed, unchangeable. This conception of human life dominates in her writing. There are not more than two or three instances, if indeed there are any, of exception to the rule that the personages of her plot develop in character along a rigid line self-determined by their own persistent original identity. Hardly thrice does it occur that one of these conquers circumstances. They all alike succumb to fate—to the *themselves* and the *not themselves*, as Mr. Arnold would say.

Now, that the persistency of human character is an idea or a fact, verifiable enough from experience and from observation to be awful, to be appalling, to be everything dire indeed, short of being absolutely overwhelming, I have no disposition to deny. It is one of the most intimate, most constant, most controlling of my own personal convictions. It may well *almost* master any deeply self-conscious mind. This resilient, this indestructible spring of personal identity within us, by virtue of which we return resistlessly to the old self, that we always really remained, from whatever forced escape and change we may, for a time, fancy that we have achieved for ourselves forever—who of us is there that has not shuddered at the consciousness of it? We live bound to a constant point by an elastic

tether. We have some freedom of range. We may stretch our bond somewhat, and cheat ourselves into some sense of being at liberty. But the bond holds. We cannot break it. We cannot impair its perpetual strength. Beyond a certain limit we cannot continue to stretch it. That limit reached, the bond resumes to itself its delusively yielded power of resistance to our efforts against it. One sudden contractile throe of its terrible elasticity, and we are brought sheer back to our centre. This is what thoughtful men have habitually observed and experienced. It is something that is still more intensely, as more intimately, dreadful than what Dr. Holmes figured with his famous water-drop in the heart of the crystal[1] to represent the human will vainly free in its enclosure of circumstance. He was seeking a symbol for the wall of external condition that surrounds and imprisons us. I seek an expression for the law of condition that is incorporated in us. But both these ideas, the inward and the outward fate that restrains or compels us, seem to have taken tyrannous possession of George Eliot's mind. Destiny is hardly more to the pagan Greek tragedists than it is to Christian George Eliot. (I use Christian now simply to note a condition of time and circumstance.) And the tragedy of the idea is greater with the Christian than it is with the Greek.

George Eliot has borrowed from Christianity for her novels, unconsciously perhaps, but beyond her power to help it at any rate, elements and conditions that make the struggle of the helpless human will with fate in her representation tenfold harder and more forlorn than it

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[1] "I see myself, but yet I cannot apprehend it. It is *a drop of dew, shut up in the heart of a rock.*"—Auerbach's "On the Heights." (Translation, Roberts Brothers' edition, p. 302.)

could by any possibility be under the undisturbed dominion of purely pagan ideas. To oppose a stoic resolution "not to be overcome," against the impenetrable, inexorable breast of fate—that was the comparatively simple and easy achievement that pagan tragedy in its loftiest moods could satisfy itself completely with letting its hard-pressed gods or heroes accomplish. But George Eliot, in her far different light, sees too deeply and too truly what is indeed the highest ideal of morality for her to be content with offering such a release of virtue to her characters. Her men and women must be more than stoics if they are to be heroes to George Eliot. They must be *Christian* stoics. They must do more than merely endure. They must overcome. Self-abnegation, self-sacrifice—nothing less than this Christian virtue—is the worthy stoicism for George Eliot. But to be self-denying, self-sacrificing, like Christ, not in imitation of Christ—to have the Christian spirit without the Christian motive—well, it is still noble and beautiful as a conception, but the impossibility makes it so infinitely pathetic! And this to wisely thoughtful minds is the true pathos of George Eliot's novels.

Hope is the very element of the Christian life. It is an apostolic word, "We are saved by hope." But George Eliot tries to save us without hope. A gentle, pitying, pitiful despair broods in her books with tear-laden eyelids and tearless eyes over a world to be noble —and unhappy, in. It is a "sad astrology."

I do not go behind the books themselves to find a light in which to read the books. What I have said lies written all over the noble and mournful pages of her novels. We read and we seem all the time to dwell in a world over which the crystal sky hangs like a hollow hemisphere of glass, emptied of the ambient

element of hope, and with walls as of a mirror admitting no light from beyond, but only mocking us with wearisome reflections of the light that is here. It is like trying to breathe under an exhausted receiver. It is like trying to see *through* the plane of a mirror. We pray for air, we pray for light. We might, perhaps dispense with breathing here, if indeed the world has no atmosphere of hope in which we may breathe. But if we are to gasp and to die we at least would wish to be comforted with some glimpses "less forlorn" of a life beyond life. But the sky slopes pitilessly down, the horizon never lifts. "O dark, dark, dark, irrecoverably dark!"

To such a view of the moral atmosphere of George Eliot's novels, some readers may object: "Why surely there is a good deal of wholesome cheerfulness in these books." And surely, say I, there is. But their tone is sombre. The lights of humor and gayety in them are foil only to the prevailing melancholy and gloom that overhang them, like a beclouded sky filling the world everywhere with shadow. What a sad life was poor Tulliver's, and what a blank end of it came! How Maggie toiled in the toils of her fate, to have her proud spirit quenched at last like the quenching of a candle! And Tom! And Romola! And Lydgate! Nay, and Dorothea herself! "Ill-matched," all of them, "with the meanness of opportunity" here, and hereafter—nothing. One must succeed, beyond what I can, in resolutely refusing to read between the lines, not to be oppressed with a sense like this as he lives for a time in the world of George Eliot's men and women and children.

Another of my readers may say: "Yes, George Eliot's novels are sad books, but the world is a sad world. Life *is* the tragedy George Eliot represents it. She is not to be blamed, or even to be criticised, but

to be praised rather, that, seeing deeply into the truth of things, as she does, she honestly shows us what she finds." Well, I grant that the world is just the dark world—that human life is just the sorrowful riddle—that George Eliot makes them. It is the truth. The malignity of circumstances is indeed slow to give way, only a little, even before the singular pureness and simplicity and high-heartedness of a Dorothea. If it gives way at all, it is very, very little, and the chances are that then it only seems to give way. Rosamond, it may be, will be forced sufficiently out of her "egoism" by the impact of Dorothea's "altruistic" nobleness—sufficiently to let Dorothea herself through the straits that had been grudging her passage into the farther sea of her fortunes. But Rosamond will remain the same yielding persistency of opposition and defeat to Lydgate as before. This is George Eliot's representation, and this, I acknowledge, is human life. Lydgate may take the waves of adverse circumstance with as good heart of controversy as he will. The world will prove "too many" for him. Lydgate is as helpless as Tulliver. The same heavy hand of necessity is upon them both. A dreadful imminent defeat defeats them from the very beginning and throughout the whole continuance of the strife. They fight against a foregone conclusion of their fight. It is quite as if they contended in view of the celestial balance hung on high with the beam already inclined visibly against them. They go to the war and through the war with the spirit of Turnus, and with Turnus's fate foreknown on their part to await them. Maggie perhaps escapes this despair of foreboding, but, no less, observers behold her led by her fate helplessly like a lamb to the altar.[1] If

[1] One feels, by the way, like making it a grievance against the author that she did not provide some nobler occasion of extreme

Lucy's sweet and wholesome nature is proof against the bitterness and sourness of condition—it is still, as we see,

> Not that the grounds of hope were fix'd,
> The elements were kindlier mix'd

in her case. That is all.

I acknowledge, I say, that life—the outward spectacle of life which we behold and part of which we are—is really, as George Eliot represents it, like this. I go further. I acknowledge that sin is just the malignant persistent immortality that she makes it. If Tito will choose his own will and pleasure, then Tito's sin shall follow him like a Nemesis—hunt him through life and hunt him out of life. If Bulstrode will cover up a lie, will stanch a running sore to hide it from the public eye, and turn it into a blind and inward ulcer to vent its horrid virus upon his very vitals, then Bulstrode's sin shall change the basis of his being into rottenness. Scarcely the most extravagant theodicies of those that exaggerate the self-reproducing, self-pun-

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temptation to Maggie than that lay figure, that animated fashion-plate, young Mr. Stephen Guest. Maggie deserved to escape her wreck on a more heroic reef.

Again. It does not much affect either the literary or the moral value of "The Mill on the Floss"—its disappointing close. But that flood is too near to the melodramatic, and the actual catastrophe is a curious impossibility. How should an interlocked mass of wooden fragments, stretching quite across the swollen stream, have been borne on by the flood faster than was the boat that carried Maggie and Tom—especially when the strength of Tom's powerful rowing was added to the stress of the mid-current to urge the boat along? And yet the story seems to make the mass of wooden fragments *overtake* and overwhelm the boat. It is not melodrama, however, but tragedy, unrelieved and blank, when brother and sister in that phantasmagoric scene find at last a

> landing-place to clasp and say,
> Farewell! We lose ourselves in—*dark!*

ishing power of sin could exceed the representations of George Eliot.

In all this, I repeat once more, I am entirely at one with George Eliot. She sees deeply and she sees truly into the great mystery and the great tragedy of human life. More than even thus much. Her interest in dealing with the grave problems of our existence here is a sincerely and nobly moral interest. And still, and still, I am constrained to believe, notwithstanding all this truth in thought and pureness in purpose on her part, George Eliot is exerting an influence to hinder more than to help her brothers and sisters in their struggles against sin. There are some, no doubt,—there are many indeed,—both men and women, who need to be taught through a Tito and a Bulstrode,[1] what a dreadful germ of development sin is. But then we are all of us sinners in our degree, and if sin be what George Eliot makes it, and what I believe it, then the matter of present degree signifies nothing. The end is the same, whatever the present degree. In all, as in one, sin when it is finished bringeth forth death. We all, I say, are sinners, and what concerns us chiefly is not to know the consequence of this better than we now do, except

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[1] Bulstrode is perhaps the least real, the most like an impersonated tendency, among the characters of George Eliot's creation. But if there are no Bulstrodes in actual life, there is plenty of Bulstrode's quality distributed in various measures to members of Christian communities almost everywhere. For my own part, therefore, I find no fault with the author as guilty of any unfairness, intentional or otherwise, toward the Christian name in her delineation of Bulstrode. I believe I know, from experience, no less than from observation, the potentialities of human nature too well. There is no malignant glee manifested on the part of the novelist, as if she were glutting some long-famished grudge against evangelical Christianity. On the contrary, the severity of the fact is even enhanced by the evident relenting gentleness of the narrative.

as better knowledge may incite to keener desire of escape, if escape be anywise possible; but what concerns us chiefly is to learn how the too certain and too dreadful consequence of sin may be avoided. If there be no salvation for us, then it can only make us still worse through despair to be taught that we are helpless—true, horribly true, though it be. On the other hand, if there is salvation for us, then not to hint this, to write as if there were not, is to slay us with despair when we might have been succored and revived with hope. But hopelessness I find to be the prevailing moral tone of George Eliot's novels. She writes with truth and with power for a world into which sin has entered, and death by sin. But she writes too as for a world in which there is no redemption from sin. Alas! George Eliot seems not to have heard that once for all, some eighteen hundred years or more ago, death was swallowed up in victory!

There is nothing, however, consciously or purposely hostile to Christ in all her books.[1] There is nothing either, in her apparent attitude toward Christ, of offensive patronage or of easy, self-conceited comprehension. George Eliot contrasts strongly here with Auerbach, between whom and her there are, at other points, some traits of resemblance. Their use of psychological analysis is similar, and both writers write rather for the sake of the thought that they wish to express than for the sake of any story that they have to tell. But Auer-

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[1] I do not forget that an unacknowledged translation of Strauss's "Life of Jesus" is attributed with probable truth to the hand of George Eliot. But that she should have chosen to engage in such literary work as translating Strauss and Feuerbach ("Essence of Christianity") is, I prefer to trust, evidence rather of that fascination which she could not but feel in the Man of Calvary, than of any hostility to his claims. The fact that these translations remain unacknowledged confirms the more welcome presumption.

bach, if one does not mistake in identifying the author's own sentiment, is a self-satisfied dogmatist where George Eliot, far more nobly, as well as far more wisely, is fain to remain in doubt. Auerbach, accordingly, has his plan of salvation for us—a plan which, if it were not preposterous enough to provoke a smile, would nevertheless be impracticable enough to dishearten us still more completely than does George Eliot's mournful shake of the head on the subject. Auerbach says, Save *yourself;* George Eliot says, Save yourself, you cannot. Auerbach quotes Christ, and shelves him in a niche of his pantheon. George Eliot, on the contrary, scarcely once mentioning his name, seems to stand as in a suspense of doubt and awe toward Christ. She breathes no articulate syllable in derogation from his claims. I can fancy George Eliot's earnest and noble spirit poised and pausing thus long in a balance of indetermination respecting the Man of Calvary. She seems half ready to exclaim, My Lord and my God. Her posture in his presence is a prolonged, still unready, reluctant, resisting, passionate perhaps. God knows, but I desire to hope that if she persists in not reckoning herself among those who are openly for Christ, Christ himself, in the largeness of his wisdom and love, may include George Eliot among those who yet are not against him. At any rate, her books all read as if she took heed to her pen in this regard, lest haply she should be found fighting against God.

There are points of interesting resemblance and contrast, both literary and ethical, between George Eliot and Hawthorne. The style of each is exquisite. Both depend for the interest of their novels on other elements than narrative and plot. Both are comparatively weak in invention and construction. Both are profoundly and, in their several ways, painfully psychological. Is

it Hawthorne, or is it George Eliot, that exposes to us the motive and method of his work when we read as follows in "Twice-told Tales": "Then might I exemplify how an influence, beyond our control, lays its strong hand on every deed which we do, and weaves its consequences into an iron tissue of necessity." Arthur Dimmesdale and Mr. Bulstrode are evident moral congeners. These specifications perhaps exhaust the points of mutual resemblance between the authors. The points of contrast are curious and striking. Hawthorne is perhaps no more subjective than George Eliot; but he is far less objective than she. George Eliot, accordingly, would seem to be the more amply endowed, the more evenly balanced nature of the two. Hawthorne is not so learned as George Eliot, nor so familiarly conversant with contemporary thought. Hawthorne is vastly less dramatic, less versatile in dialogue, than George Eliot. Hawthorne's attitude toward the supernatural is in most suggestive and stimulating contrast to George Eliot's. You feel all the time in reading Hawthorne that you are under the spell of a wizard who possesses a strange power of imposing upon your imagination with the effect of a supernaturalism in which he does not believe himself. You are kept constantly on the wavering border that joins the world of sense with a world of superstitious fancy felt to be almost equally real. The conjurer that plays this trick upon your own imagination you seem to be aware has himself an imagination proof by skepticism against the reflex influence of his own woven measures and waving hands. On the contrary, George Eliot is a severe exorcist of superstition. Her world is a world of pure naturalism. Weird is a word that is always on your lips to characterize Hawthorne's quality. The word is never so much as once suggested

in speaking of George Eliot. A bluff breeze blows her books clear of clinging mists — a broad light, equally diffused, dissipates all haunting supernatural shadows. At the same time, you cannot help suspecting that toward the real supernatural, of which there is none in her books, George Eliot turns a more believing heart than did Hawthorne toward the mock supernaturalism, suggested rather than expressed, of which his books are so full.

I do not remember any instance in George Eliot's books of allusion to the idea of human immortality, either to adopt it or to reject it, either to desire it or to deprecate it. There is, so far as I recall, absolutely no future for man beyond death even for a moment suggested to the reader, except by the author's occasional most suggestive silence on the subject. You may peruse the whole horizon again and again throughout its three hundred and sixty degrees. There is never a point where it gives upon a prospect outside. This no doubt is in accordance with a conscientious purpose on the part of George Eliot. She is intellectually a positivist, in the sense of accepting nothing for certainly true that she cannot submit to tests of experience. But to use one of her own recurring passionate expressions, her heart, I must believe, "gives a great leap," now and again, of protest and rebellion against the convictions of her head. I cannot but trust that her heart will yet conquer and lead that great intellect captive to the foot of the Cross.

I detect no zeal and no cunning of proselytism animating her books. I doubt if she believes the bald naturalism, the virtual materialism, of her reputed school in philosophy ardently enough to become a conscious propagandist of its doctrines. She has too much misgiving, if I should not rather say hope, that Chris-

tianity may be true. She is too noble a nature. She loves her kind too well. She would rather not lead than run the risk of misleading.

But unintentionally she does mislead when she emphasizes the obstinate persistency of human character in a way to leave the impression that there is not a friendly power of help at hand stronger still than the strength of native depravity. She does mislead when she represents the world of natural condition around us, steeled itself, as it is, against human entreaty, to be also void of benignant supernatural invasion ready to reinforce and to rescue the failing better will of men and women with effectual succor. She does mislead when she describes the malignant capacity of development which belongs to the nature of sin, as if there were nowhere a corresponding capacity of arrest and reversal provided, abundantly able to destroy both sin and its consequences. She does mislead when she nobly inculcates self-denial and self-sacrifice without mention of the only motive that historically ever enabled living men and women loug to practice self-denial and self-sacrifice. She does mislead when she writes as if the doctrine of atonement, of vicarious suffering, of "altruism," to use the term of a school, were but a doctrine, a hopeless doctrine, and not also, and much rather, a fact, a hope-inspiring fact. If George Eliot had forborne to "handle spiritual strife" at all, it might not have been incumbent on her to introduce so necessary a condition of any fruitful solution of the problem of sin as that condition which Jesus entered inseparably into human history eighteen luminous Christian centuries ago. Again I say, I make no accusation of purposed infidelity to Jesus or to the souls that Jesus came to save, on the part of this great writer. But it is the truth, nevertheless, however conscience-clear she may

have been in doing so, that she has left out of her scheme of human conditions the master-condition of all. Christ indeed, though obscurely under an anonym, is present here in almost everything, except only that which is chief in his character, his power to save. His life of devotion is accepted, without express acknowledgment it is true, as the ideal of human conduct. But the miracles of supernatural intervention attending his life, that revealed an invisible sphere of spiritual power environing us round in sympathy and alliance with struggling goodness—there is no effect admitted from these. Gethsemane with its agony, Calvary with its passion, Joseph's tomb with its shrouded dead—these are here in effect. But the empty tomb, the resurrection, the ascension, captivity led captive, the thanks be to God which giveth *us* the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ, these are nowhere present in any helpful influence in George Eliot's books.

I feel, as I have said, that George Eliot desires to be morally helpful to her fellow-creatures. Her best characters she makes to be sources of exalting inspiration to all the susceptible souls that come within their reach. Goodness in her descriptions possesses a kind of magnetic virtue to communicate itself. There is a natural flow of the element from soul to soul. Janet receives it from Mr. Tryan—Romola receives it from Savonarola; Dorothea—she possesses it, but hardly, in her ill-matching conditions, finds to whom she may impart it. George Eliot does thus teach us that goodness is not alone in the world. She shows us how it stands always in a never-broken circuit of mutual electric sympathy and help. But the heavenly magnetism has, in her representations, no certain, unfailing, abiding source. It is natural only. Now it is not enough for us that we have help. We must have suf-

ficient help. Janet, if the representation be carefully noticed, depends on Mr. Tryan. Mr. Tryan does not succeed in transferring her dependence from himself to a supernatural power. Janet's repentance is really human love for a human object, converted into another form of its correlated existence, the form of renovated character. You are subtly made to feel that it is only a chance mould, that into which Mr. Tryan's own experience has fallen, the mould of evangelical religion. Mr. Tryan's language is strictly orthodox, and it is used by him with absolute sincerity. But the author somehow causes you to perceive that according to her own conviction the orthodox phrase in which Mr. Tryan speaks is really nothing more than unconsciously provincial dialect, to express an experience that is purely natural, and therefore perfectly capable of expression in the natural language of morals and philosophy. In Savonarola George Eliot makes her nearest approach to representing a character that truly receives himself from an invisible supernatural source the magnetic virtue of spiritual invigoration and help which he imparts to others. But Romola, having been braced by his influence to her highest heroic tone of character and conduct, yet finds her faith in him left to her at last but the ghost of a loyalty that desired, and was denied, the boon of being perfect. Precisely where the natural ceases, and the supernatural would begin, George Eliot halts. Oh, George Eliot, I know as well as you that natural men have their limitations—their moral limitations. Savonarola was weak, perhaps was wicked. But was Jesus? Had Jesus any moral limitations? Was Jesus then a natural man? Did not the supernatural become historical in Jesus? Is there not a Saviour for us? If not, we pray you cease tormenting us with the awakened consciousness of our help-

lessness under sentence of death by sin. If there is a Saviour, then at the moment of that sorest extremity to which you reduce us, pray whisper, as surely you might know how so well, the gospel of his name. A gospel of some sort, be sure, more than all things else, we need. And many of us, during eighteen hundred years at least, have found our most effectual help against sin in believing the gospel that sin shall not have dominion over us, that we are not under *law*, but under grace.

I set out with saying that George Eliot makes no distinctive impression for herself of sex, either in her intellectual or in her moral quality. This, when I consider her, as I undertook to do, in her books alone, still seems to me to be true. But as often as I permit myself to consider her likewise in her reputed relation to that school in philosophy which teaches the ancient doctrine of necessity, under the modern name of development, I tend somehow to experience an almost contrary feeling. There is apparently a contrast here between George Eliot and her brethren in philosophical faith. Her attitude is not altogether the same as theirs toward the creed which they unite in confessing. Her brethren believe with the head, and, so far as appears, do not doubt with the heart. George Eliot assents, perhaps unquestioningly, with her head. But her heart demurs and rebels. It is a woman's voice after all that one hears crying that monotonous passionate cry throughout George Eliot's works—a cry of helpless grief, of outraged, implacable sense of wrong, against this great, deaf, impassible universe. Not that her mind is therefore less. It is only that therefore her heart is more. And our George Eliot is still by so much greater than we found her, by how much she proves after all to be a woman.

MR. LOWELL'S POETRY.

IT is hard to say how much it is virtue and how much felicity that runs in the blood of some families, to distinguish them with an honorable fame, through various branches and during successive generations. The Lowells, of Massachusetts, enjoy a good civic, and social, and literary renown, which is coeval with the date of the republic, and which constitutes one of the truest, and one of the least alienable, of the treasures of its history. The commonwealth of Massachusetts is rich in the heraldry of such illustrious names; but the commonwealth of Massachusetts has no gentler blood than that which has descended, without taint, from John Lowell, of the days of Washington, to James Russell Lowell, the laureate of Abraham Lincoln. As long as the archives of the Supreme Court of the United States continue to be consulted; as long as cotton is woven in the looms of Lowell, on the banks of the Merrimac; as long as the Lowell Institute, of Boston, instructs the American community in religion, science, literature, and the arts, the fame of the Lowells is secure. If these anchors should hereafter drag in the urgent drift of time, then there is that in the volumes now under review, which will still hold against the stress of whatever storm does not overwhelm the language itself in which they are written.

The appearance of "Under the Willows," occurring after an interval of twenty years from the date of Mr. Lowell's previous volumes, is too important an event in the annals of American books not to be signalized by a notice, of respectful dimensions, in every periodical claiming to be, in any degree, an organ of American literature. It is not without a sense of pain that we welcome this addition to the world's slowly-increasing store of genuine poetry. It is too small an addition to stand for the whole poetical fruitage of such genius as Mr. Lowell's, during twenty such years of his life. We deprecate the omen, but Mr. Lowell's prime, though vigorous yet, will hardly endure to furnish him a like term of productiveness again. When we consider the "prosperous labor" which Tennyson's thrifty genius has accomplished within the same period, and consider, too, that perhaps the chief difference between Lowell and Tennyson lies, not in their gifts, but in their use of their gifts,—alas, we involuntarily fall to forgetting what Mr. Lowell has done, in vainly guessing and missing the more that he might have done. Sixteen years ago, the editor of "Putnam's Monthly," with a natural preference, which possibly the "Fable for Critics," with its dedication, and its genial notice of *Harry Franco*, may help one understand, expressed to us the opinion that Lowell was a greater poet than Tennyson. We are much inclined ourselves to believe that Tennyson's genius excels chiefly in that which, after all, constitutes the chief excellence of genius—the faculty of work—industry. We may do Mr. Lowell wrong in saying this. We must not forget that poetry is the vocation of a lifetime with Tennyson. It is scarcely more than the avocation of a stolen leisure, now and then, with Mr. Lowell. During the greater part of twenty years past, Mr.

Lowell has been the incumbent of a laborious professorship at Harvard. More recently, he has been an editor, too. And, especially about the time of the rebellion, his incisive prose invigorated many a page of "The Atlantic Monthly" with articles, each one of which was as a battle gained for the republic at her utmost need. So, then, with nothing further said that might seem to abate the grace of our greeting, we loyally thank Mr. Lowell for his volume, small as it is. It is precious, nevertheless,—*ὀλίγον τε φίλον τε.* We have been querulous like Achilles. It is but fit that we should now be at least as appreciative as he.

This new volume will naturally attract the public attention afresh to its two predecessors of so many years ago. It will be more satisfactory, therefore, to consider the three volumes together, and to review Mr. Lowell's poetry as a whole.

We need not give much space to an examination of that part of his poetry which belongs to the feminine stage of the poet's development. Feminine, we say; and we do not mean effeminate. The earliest poem, in the first collection, is no more effeminate than the latest, in the last. The quality of the strength exhibited does not seem to be much changed from the one to the other; but the volume of the strength is bravely expanded from the "Threnodia" of the author's youth, to the "Commemoration Ode" of his full maturity. Virility, not perhaps in its most athletic, but certainly in a fine and true meaning of the word, is present in every line that has ever come from Mr. Lowell's pen. A considerable number, however, of the pieces in the first volume are the offspring of a genius manifestly impregnated from the ascendant influence particularly of Tennyson, whose star had already arisen on some foreseeing minds about the time at which Mr. Lowell

was an undergraduate of Harvard. These pieces are full of poetry; they even read more smoothly than do many of the later works of the same hand; but they are imitations, and not creations. The "Prometheus," for example, is a monologue, in blank verse, after the manner of Tennyson's "Ulysses." It is a noble poem, but it quite fails of the statuesque perfection of Tennyson's matchless modern antique. The "Prometheus" is Greek in color, although the tone of the color is mixed with a dash of spirit that is not Greek, nor yet Eastern, nor ancient, nor pagan. But this is intentional, and it harmonizes well with the allegorizing use which is made of the myth. The great lack of the poem is in that which should have constituted its chief praise. It lacks in severity and in density. If the idea had been treated with the measure of success of which it was worthy, the literature of this famous personage would have been illustrated with one more poem, not unfit to rank with the few masterpieces, on the same subject, that are destined to be immortal. "St. Simeon Stylites" is suggested by the "Prometheus." The old saint seems, indeed, to be a kind of grotesque ecclesiastic travesty of the mythic pagan hero. It is a coincidence worthy of note, that Tennyson's volumes, containing the "Ulysses" and "St. Simeon Stylites," were published in England the year before the composition of the "Prometheus," according to the date which Mr. Lowell has himself modestly affixed to his poem. It would be ungracious not to be warned off from very serious criticism of Mr. Lowell's brilliant experiment by a *caveat* so delicate and indicative of a consciousness so just.

It is curious, by the way, and provocative of exceedingly varied and, as it were, anachronistic reflections, to remember that the "Prometheus" first saw

the light in the old "Democratic Review" of the antediluvian political world. A Democratic Review of now-a-days would hardly be Mr. Lowell's preference, as his medium of communication with the literary public.

Among the other pieces dated by the poet, are various exquisitely modulated echoes of Tennyson, especially in the Englishman's earlier and more purely sensuous style. But there is one piece among them, echoed, it seems to us, from nowhere, unless from some valley of "rich foreshadowings," secluded within the musing poet's own heart. It is the delicious poem, entitled "My Love." The woman of this piece is so charmingly idealized, in the most modern Christian, or perhaps we should say civilized, spirit, and the stanzas are so interfused with a certain quaint and liquid sweetness of diction and rhythm, flowing around them and between, and floating them, like so many fair islands of Delos, ready to be moored in the reader's memory—that only with a great effort of self-denial do we refrain from quoting them in full. Happy the lover who has found a love like that which Mr. Lowell first guessed, we suppose, and then put forth, not in vain, we believe, to discover!

> I love her with a love as still
>   As a broad river's peaceful might,
> Which, by high tower and lowly mill,
> Goes wandering at its own will,
>   And yet doth ever flow aright.
>
> And on its full, deep breast serene,
>   Like quiet isles my duties lie;
> It flows around them and between,
> And makes them fresh and fair and green,
>   Sweet homes wherein to live and die.

Happier still—the sweet seriousness of these exquisite stanzas, amounting to something that is almost more

than the natural piety of a poet, does not forbid the suggestion—happier still, and far more securely happy, the soul whose love of what is at once Human and Divine exercises the wholesome and helpful influence here described.

None but a nature fortunate in a singular manly sweetness, as certainly none but a nature doomed and sealed to poetry, could possibly have conceived, at twenty-one, an ideal so Selene-like of "perfect wifehood and pure lowlihead." "Isabel" is like it, but lacks the warmth and color which, we respectfully venture to guess, something in the poet's heart, yet more ideal than his fancy, imparted to the idyll of Lowell. No wonder that a moral constitution so happily balanced, especially if the balance of it were afterward still further confirmed by the finding of the reality of his beautiful dream—no wonder that such a moral constitution has preserved Mr. Lowell from soiling his verse with even a dash of that unchaste suggestion, which many recent poets, not pagan by birth, however pagan by sympathy, require us to forget in their character before we can suffer ourselves to admire their genius. Once only, so far as we remember, has a humorous-malicious conceit of verisimilitude (in the "Fable for Critics") conspired with stress of rhyme to force the national half-oath of Great Britain from the pen of the apparently protesting poet. He was speaking of Theodore Parker—and the word was, we confess, strictly hypo-sulphurous, considering the circumstances.

The "Legend of Brittany" appeared in the same collection with the "Prometheus" (1844); but the date of its composition is not subjoined in the present reissue, as is the case with the latter poem. The "Legend of Brittany," indeed, needs deprecate nothing, at the hands of the critic, on the score of the author's youth.

It has faults, but they are not juvenile faults. It is a marvel of infinite delicacy, in treatment of a subject intrinsically too disagreeable to have been worthy of being treated at all. We think, likewise, that, the choice supposed, the artist should have exercised greater freedom in moulding the legend to poetical uses. Mr. Lowell inartistically betrays his consciousness of having been entangled in an unhappy theme, by two or three stanzas of downright didactics, at the commencement of the second part of his poem, wherein we are taught the principles of art on which we ought to relish disagreeable subjects. The intractable prosaicisms in expression, which necessarily occur here, divide the career of the poet's Pegasus into two separate flights, more effectually than any device of typography could do.

The poem is what it is in plot. The reader is as helpless about it as probably Mr. Lowell was when he wrote it. It is to be appreciated, not as a whole, but as made up of passages. It is not valuable, as the best works of art are valuable—for what it is—but for what it contains. It contains a larger amount of essential mere poetry than any other poem, long or short (always excepting the one perfect mood of his heart and his hand, "The Vision of Sir Launfal"), that Mr. Lowell has written. A larger amount, but of a merit many, many degrees more humble than the lofty strain of the "Commemoration Ode." The poetry of the "Legend" is ethereal in quality. The soul of song soars in it as if language had become, for her behoof, a buoyant ether that took away all sense of weight, and with it all need of wings. There is no more airy-footed versification, out of Shelley, in the English language. Shelley himself is hardly more musical—hardly more purely and merely poetical. And yet there is a hover-

ing human interest in the "Legend," which has fled, shuddering, out of Shelley's pages everywhere, and left them blank and cold.

Mr. Lowell likens his Margaret to

> A summer cloud thrilled through with rosy light.

Shelley would have had his cloud blanched to the pure "white radiance of eternity." Mr. Swinburne displays much the same absolute mastery of language to the musical uses of verse as Shelley, and as Mr. Lowell in the "Legend." Shelley is the white Aurora Borealis; Swinburne, where fit to be talked about at all, the Aurora Borealis, waving banners of color; Lowell here, the warm sunshine, flushed with a thousand shimmering hues.

We string together a few pearls from the "Legend," as specimens of its riches.

Of Margaret's moral nature, Mr. Lowell says that it was

> Of white and gracious thoughts the chosen home.

Margaret used to indulge her maiden dreams in woodland dells,

> And in the nunneries of silent nooks.

How otherwise, to the happy souls that have explored Love's blessed abyss themselves, could the "rapine sweet" of that delirious fall be more satisfactorily described than in the following line?—

> From mistily golden deep to deep he fell.

In the couplet given below, which felicity is more consummate, the fitness of the simile itself, or the fitness of phrase with which the simile is expressed? And what if "Locksley Hall" had wedded the Aurora Borealis to a woman's blush before? It was no more the

same likeness between them as Lowell's that Tennyson saw, than is the rainbow the same which you and I simultaneously see, standing side by side together. We are not sure that Lowell did not look with even a finer eye than Tennyson here. Margaret's color came and went

> As snow o'er which a blush of northern-light
> Suddenly reddens, and as soon grows white.

"A sunlit fall of rain" has flashed in verse elsewhere, with an exceeding beauty of showery evanescence, as much like a sudden largess of diamonds from a prince of the "gorgeous East," as is the brilliant phenomenon in nature. But when will it ever again illumine a stanza with a liquid April sparkle of moral "sweetness and light," altogether so magically tender as what follows?

> Her summer nature felt a need to bless,
> And a like longing to be blest again;
> So, from her sky-like spirit, gentleness
> Dropt ever like a sunlit fall of rain,
> And his beneath drank in the bright caress
> As thirstily as would a parchëd plain,
> That long hath watched the showers of sloping gray
> Forever, ever, falling far away.

"Sky-like spirit" is a wedding of words which Mr. Lowell repeats somewhere else in his poetry—perhaps in one of his sonnets. As for the vanishing, echo-like music of the last line, it is to us inexhaustible of beauty. It sings itself, like one exquisite song that we remember of Chopin's, in which the words, when rightly given, go rocking off from the hearkening sense into silence more musical than sound, as a lark might soar, swaying away from the sight, into the drowning blue of the sky. And that one verse, too, is a perfect sound-picture of the scene. You seem in it to see with your ear the hoary showers far off sheet down aslant in silent, visionary rain.

How much nice observation, and how much pictorial power, combined with what a transferred effect of lavish self-bestowment in love, do the following lines, descriptive of Margaret's devotion, contain:

> Like golden ripples hasting to the land
> To wreck their freight of sunshine on the strand.

The "fine frenzy" of love, making those intense electric motions in the happy lunatic's head which bewilder him with a sense of blissful pain and scintillating light, is thus described:

> Flooded he seemed with bright delicious pain,
> As if a star had burst within his brain.

This is a couplet to form a touchstone for the indefinable poetic sense in a reader. Many intelligent readers imagine that they love poetry, when it is only the story, or the moral, of the poetry, that pleases them. But here is poetry, about as unadulterated as you ever get it in words of human speech. The grandfathers of the old "North American Review" were scandalized by it. Professor Felton, we think it was, that conceived a joke about it. He italicized a paraphrase of the poet's figure, which made it more intelligible, and then, if we remember right, invited laughter with an exclamation point: "*As if a bomb-shell had burst*" within his brain! No doubt the learned professor was honestly unable to construe the fine poetry of the somewhat daring expression which he criticised. He had often set Mr. Lowell right on a Greek rendering, in the class-room at Harvard, and it was with a sort of magisterial pleasantry, we suppose, that he now sought to recall his old pupil to safe common sense, in reviewing his poetry. But the two minds were native to different elements, and Professor Felton's admonition was like the hen's moth-

erly note of alarm to a duck, amongst her brood, taking to the water.

But we have given space enough to this experiment of the poet in legendary romance. The anonymous author of the "Fable for Critics" accuses Lowell of being a preaching poet. Certainly, Lowell seldom works "without a conscience or an aim;" and his moral earnestness and instinctive partisanship with virtue are quite apparent in the "Legend of Brittany." But, on the whole, the didactic spirit is less obstrusive here, and the sensuous delight in mere beauty is more freely indulged, than perhaps anywhere else in the entire compass of the volumes.

"The Present Crisis" bears a date which is probably designed by the author to note an historic, rather than an autobiographic epoch. The date is "December, 1845." This, it will be remembered, was the winter in which the annexation of Texas was formally and finally accomplished. Presaging minds then discerned, in this measure of territorial aggrandizement, a long forward reach of slavery toward continued preponderance in the Senate of the United States. Lowell wrote his poem as a kind of political pamphlet on the side of anti-slavery, while the question was yet pending. It bears the marks of its inspiration. It is vehement, fervid, intense—moral didactics at white heat. The poetry of it is almost magnificent—and yet Lowell, we should say, was "God-conquered" in it by the inspiring divinity of moral prophecy, rather than of song. He is more a seer in it than a bard. We re-open the volume to read again, and we feel half remorseful for stinting our praise of the poetry, which, in truth, only falls short, as perhaps also it should, of mastering the turbulent madness of the ascendant moral mood. The metre is the ringing one of "Locksley Hall." It is not

arranged in couplets, however, but in stanzas, each composed of a couplet and a triplet of rhymes. The stanza is a powerful one, and discharges its gathering momentum in a tremendous blow at the close.

What the immediate effect of the poem was, we are unable to say. We should suppose, however, that its obscurity, or, not to say obscurity, its hiding sense, must have unfitted it to be a very popular Roland-stroke of alarm for freedom. The "North American Review" of the time affected not to understand its aim; but assured its author that age would gradually reconcile him to the world as it was. We have seen an assemblage of more than ordinarily astute wits fairly at fault to divine the meaning of some one or two of the passages. And yet Lowell certainly had a meaning in each one of them that was definite to his own mind. He is not in poetry what that German professor was in metaphysics, to make the confession: "Probably God and I knew what I meant by that when I wrote it. God may know now; but, most assuredly, I do not."

The intensity of the following passage, descriptive of the diffusive disastrous effect of a successful political crime, is certainly an intensity of heat rather than of light:

So the Evil's triumph sendeth, with a terror and a chill,
Under continent to continent, the sense of coming ill,
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels his sympathies with God
In hot tear-drops ebbing earthward, to be drunk up by the sod,
Till a corpse crawls round unburied, delving in the nobler clod.

The imbruting influence of slavery on the slave has here its ultimate expression. The mathematical limits of intensity are reached, when it is said that the slave becomes an unburied corpse, crawling about the ground, and breaking clods that are higher in the scale of exist-

ence than himself. Perhaps intensity just overleaps itself a little, and lands on the edge of extravagance.

The finest stanza in the poem is this:

For Humanity sweeps onward: where to-day the martyr stands,
On the morrow crouches Judas with the silver in his hands;
Far in front the cross stands ready and the crackling faggots burn,
While the hooting mob of yesterday in silent awe return
To glean up the scattered ashes into History's golden urn.

It was quoted by Mr. Sumner in that celebrated speech of his in the Senate, on "The Crime against Kansas," which provoked the assault of Preston Brooks, of South Carolina. If we are right in our recollection of the contemporary newspaper reports of the speech, Mr. Sumner appeared in them as a wise rhetorician to have omitted the third line, no doubt thinking that it obscured and obstructed the force of the whole, for the purpose of impassioned recitation.[1] The omission of the line, however, exposed the passage to the charge of a want of keeping, against which Mr. Lowell had striven, by the insertion of the line, though without entire success, to protect it. "Judas," as representing the traitor, seems almost inevitably to suggest Jesus as representing the martyr. But Jesus was not burned; and so the poet, hard bestead, introduces the cross, co-ordinating it, however, with the stake, which last instrument of death was necessary to furnish the imagery of the splendid concluding lines. Altogether, it is not a "faultily faultless" passage, but it is, notwithstanding, nothing less than magnificent.

A considerable number of brief poems fill up the interval, in the first volume, between "The Present

[1] The third line of the stanza, in consistency with Mr. Sumner's well-known scrupulous care in such matters, stands restored in the last edition of his works.

Crisis" and "The Vision of Sir Launfal," with which the volume closes. These are all of them excellent, but only a few of them seem to us to have that distilled excellence which makes the life-time of a poem an immortality. The first stanza of the little piece entitled "She came and went," contains a drop of this costly elixir:

> As a twig trembles, which a bird
> Lights on to sing, then leaves unbent,
> So is my memory thrilled and stirred;—
> I only know she came and went.

"The First Snow-Fall" is an old favorite of the public. It is of a mintage clearly inscribed with Mr. Lowell's personality, but stamped for universal currency.

"The Changeling" is one of several poems in the collection belonging to the domestic affections — an idyll of the hearth and heart. It is probably always doubtful how far one succeeds in reading such pieces in the dry light of literary judgment. We are apt to accuse them of too much art, if their art appears at all. The highest art accordingly consists in a "careless-ordered" appearance of neglecting art. Tennyson's lines "To J. S." are an admirable specimen of art submitting to nature in this way. "The Changeling" is extremely beautiful, though its beauty is not of a very precious order. The comparison in the following couplet, however, is striking; and, to the rightly susceptible soul, even of an aweing and silencing power. It is almost sublime. The father speaks, waking in the morning to see the changeling child of his fancy left in the place of the little one that had gone:

> And I feel as weak as a violet
> Alone 'neath the awful sky.

"The Vision of Sir Launfal" is not the greatest poem in these volumes; but we consider it, upon the whole,

to be the most perfect felicity of Mr. Lowell's genius. The plot of it is pleasing, if not wholly novel, but the execution is beyond all praise. Sir Launfal, about to set forth on the quest of the Holy Grail, has a vision; and this vision told is the theme. The poem has a moral. Indeed, the moral is the poem. Sir Launfal dreams of sallying out of his castle gate in June, himself a part of June. His undinted mail gathers the sunshine into a sheaf of beams, as he rides out, encountering at once a loathly leper, who asks an alms. Sir Launfal shudders with recoil from the contrast to his own youth, and health, and wealth, and beauty; but flings him down a piece of gold, which the beggar refuses, as not heart-meant for the heart. The knight pricks on, and rides his manly prime away in fruitless search of the prize. It is winter when the old man comes back, to find himself dispossessed of his castle and lands. He is wiser, however, and, with wisdom, has won also its meekness. He shares his crust with a beggar by the ice-roofed brook, and gives him drink from it out of his own wooden bowl. The beggar is the leper, and the leper is the Lord. The Lord teaches Sir Launfal that any crust, heartsomely shared with another, is His body; and any cup from which drink is given to a thirsty soul is the Holy Grail.

The tale is told with wonderful beauty. If the metre, and rhythm, and wayward musical flow of the verse, suggest any comparison, it is with Coleridge's rhyme of "Christabel." It is hardly so much a deduction from the merit of Mr. Lowell's genius for high originality, as it is an addition to the merit of his genius, for that exquisite elective appreciation and susceptibility of external influence, which, in his case, indeed, goes far to overlie his native quality—it is hardly, we say, so much abatement as enhancement of praise to observe that nearly every

marked piece of his poetical composition suggests a counterpart earlier than himself in English literature. This comes of the wide commerce which Mr. Lowell's generous genius holds with whatever, anywhere, is beautiful, or capable of beautiful use. The dedication of his first volume to William Page, renewed in this latest edition, testifies his intense sympathy with one art that is sister to the art of poesy. His recurring allusions to music are proof of equal love for a third sister art. Such affinities of his genius are like in spirit with those resemblances in his poems to originals elsewhere, of which we have spoken. His early studies in the antique classics of English verse, and his subsequent professional familiarity with literature, acquired, as we may guess, in conscientious fulfilment of the duties of his chair at Harvard University, rather than in obedience to the law of his own uninfluenced individual choice, have alike tended to impart a quaint, exotic flavor to his diction, and to embarrass the natural play of genius with learning—learning worn "lightly like a flower," indeed, but less graceful and less precious than would have been the spontaneous bloom which we jealously feel that it has sometimes displaced. The result has been, in some degree, to obscure, though in no degree to extinguish, Mr. Lowell's originality.

Mr. Lowell's delight in music appeared in a voluptuous description of an organ overture, pierced at last, and vocalized with a thrill of clear boy-treble from the cathedral choir, which occurs in "The Legend of Brittany." But the first stanza of his "Sir Launfal" is, at the same time, beautiful and brief enough to quote:

> Over his keys the musing organist,
>   Beginning doubtfully and far away,
> First lets his fingers wander as they list,
>   And builds a bridge from Dreamland for his lay:

> Then, as the touch of his loved instrument
> Gives hope and fervor, nearer draws his theme,
> First guessed by faint auroral flushes sent
> Along the wavering vista of his dream.

What could be more beautiful by itself as a sympathetic appreciation of the musician's mood, and what more beautiful in this place as a simile prelusive to the prelude with which the poet introduces his theme? And yet—and yet—shall we say it?—the beauty is of a sort which produces its highest effect at the first reading. You do not exactly take revenge upon your judgment by any after-shame at your first ready pleasure in the passage. It still remains to you what it was, really beautiful and very beautiful; but it does not keep yielding you further beauty, to your demand, like a flowing breast of nourishment, fed from a secret vital fountain. And notwithstanding the tokens of thought and emotion everywhere abounding innumerably in Mr. Lowell's verse that could belong only to genius, still we are bound to admit that the quality of his work is, for the most part, fugitive. When his gracious personal presence shall have finally vanished out of our world of letters, and—none remaining behind him in the "impoverished land" to tell us what he could—he shall be estimated only for what he did, then it will appear, we think, that immortality will winnow very wastefully from his work, and transmit but an exceedingly small portion of the bulk that makes these volumes. For we experience ever a disappointment, reluctantly acknowlledged even to ourselves, in repeated perusals of almost any one of Mr. Lowell's poems. They never seem less beautiful than they did at first, but they seldom seem more beautiful. There are notable exceptions to this remark, of which we shall make due mention in subsequent pages. One of these exceptions is the "Com-

memoration Ode," in the volume entitled "Under the Willows." This poem we rank as in the peerage of the few—the very few—greatest odes in the English language. To this high peerage we assign Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington"—but we shall not try to be exhaustive—only we must be permitted to say that we do *not* assign hither Dryden's much-bepraised "Alexander's Feast."

Wherein lies the defect, on account of which we pronounce the sentence "fugitive" on so much surpassing beauty? We have asked ourselves the question a hundred times. We think we have the answer. Mr. Lowell's fancy is too prolific, and his faculty of expression is too facile and too versatile. He fails by too abundant resources of success. If his fancy were more barren, or if he found greater difficulty in giving language to its teeming progeny, in either case, perhaps, he might have been thrown back upon that patient travail of the imagination—that careful, fastidious, exclusive choice, inclined to Spartan rejection, of the thoughts and images which he will, upon the whole, take the trouble to find words for—that humble waiting for crystallizing physical, and mental, and moral moods, to shape his sentiments into ultimate verbal forms, never again to be dissolved by the satisfied mind of the race—in short, with a less lavish endowment in either of the two kinds that we have mentioned, Mr. Lowell might have been remitted to that long labor of the poet which alone can bestow upon its servant the freedom of all mankind and the lease of immortality.

And after all, there is, it may be, a reason, more controlling still than any one that is personal to Mr. Lowell, for the fugacious quality of his verse. There is no poet in this country that is nothing but a poet. All

our men of genius work in the harness of some useful practical profession. They are college instructors, or physicians, or ministers, or editors, and then they may be also poets. But poetry is the by-play of a life elsewhere earnestly bestowed. Mr. Longfellow comes nearest, among our American literary men, to being exclusively a poet. But Mr. Longfellow gave twenty years of his prime to the duties of an arduous college professorship, and we have good testimony that he did not shirk those duties as in the privilege of genius and of fame. The fact remains, that in the United States division of labor has not yet reached the point of allowing our poets to devote themselves exclusively to poetry. The newness of our civilization continues to exact of us all a roundabout *savoir-faire*, hostile to the highest perfection of those seclusive and meditative habits which alone enable the poet to secrete, in fruitful tranquillity, the precious substance of his verse, and silently and slowly crystallize it into supreme and ideal forms. We remember, some years ago, meeting a solid English tradesman, as he looked, driving his solid English horse, before a two-wheeled wagon, at a ringing trot around and down a sloping curve of the solid English road, on the Isle of Wight, in the neighborhood of Mr. Tennyson's residence. The ruddy roast-beef of the man's complexion, his brown-stout corpulence, and the perfect worldliness of his whole appearance, whimsically suggested Mr. Tennyson's poetry to us under the circumstances. We could not resist the temptation to stop him, and enjoy the sensation of inquiring the way to Mr. Tennyson's house of such a man. "If now you could tell me his business?" responded he. Tennyson's business! We were well-nigh dumbfounded. We came near being in the case of Mr. John Smith, that absent-minded man who could not recall his own name

on challenge at the post-office window. We recovered our presence of mind, however, and told our friend he "made verses," we believed. "Ah, yes; the Queen's poet—Tennyson—that's the name. Yes; he makes verses—you're right—that's his business; and very clever at it he is, too, they say." This was the old world. It could hardly have been the new.

And yet poetry, certainly as much as any other vocation of genius, is jealous of a divided devotion. Nothing short of the whole man, for his whole life, will satisfy her extortionate claim. It will not even do, generally, for the poet to indulge himself in coquetting with prose. The "poet's garland and singing robes" are not an investiture to be lightly donned and doffed at will. To wear them most gracefully one must wear them habitually.

The difference between poetry and prose is an essential difference. It can hardly be defined, but it may be illustrated. Poetry differs from prose, in part, as running differs from walking. There is motion in both running and walking; but in running the motion is continuous, while in walking the motion is a series of advances, separated by intervals, less or more appreciable, of rest. Poetry runs—prose walks. Again, poetry differs from prose, as singing differs from talking. The difference between singing and talking is not that singing is musical and talking not musical. The difference is that singing is musical in one way, and talking musical, if musical, in another. Poetry sings—prose talks. Each has a rhythm; but the rhythm of each is its own.

But there is yet a finer distinction between poetry and prose than has thus been illustrated—a finer one, we mean, this side of the finest one of all, which is far too fine to be expressed in any "matter-moulded forms

of speech." There is a certain curiously subtle idiom of expression belonging to poetry, and another equally subtle idiom of expression belonging to prose. These two idioms of expression are as palpably distinct from each other as are the several idioms of different languages. They defy definition; they elude analysis. They do not depend on choice of words, and they do not depend on collocation of words, although they depend partly on both these things. A man, whose talent was that of a prose writer, might make faultless verse from a vocabulary chosen out of the purest poetry of the language, and there should not be one poetical line in his work from beginning to end. On the other hand, there is hardly an intractable word in the language that a true poet could not weave into his verse without harm to the poetic effect. In the main, the diction of a true poet and the diction of a good prose writer will be identical. The order of the poet will not vary violently from the order of the prose writer. Their subject may be the same, and even the mode of conception, and the figures of speech. All these points of coincidence between poetry and prose may exist; they generally do exist, and notwithstanding them all, the inviolate idiom of poetic expression, and the inviolate idiom of prose expression, remain uninterchangeably distinct. If poetry borrows the idiom of prose for a single instant even, the effect is immediately appreciable to the cultivated sense. It is like the effect that would be produced by the introduction of a few words of talking in the stately recitative of the opera. If prose borrows the idiom of poetry, the effect is equally appreciable. It is like the effect that would be produced by the introduction of a bar of singing in the course of common conversation. The full broadness of this contrast would, of course, exist only in extreme cases.

But Mr. Lowell's volumes furnish some illustrations —not many—on one side, of what we mean. When, for example, Mr. Lowell says, in the "Legend,"

> Mordred, for such was the young Templar's name,

he speaks in the idiom of prose. It is prose when he notes a transition about to be made with the phrase, "Here let us pause." It is prose again when he says—

> And, though the horror of it well may move
> An impulse of repugnance in the heart,
> Yet let us think, etc.

An illustration of our meaning, on the other side, is supplied in the picturesque phrase, which we quoted a little way back, from Milton's prose—"the poet's garland and singing robes." This is not metrical, but it is expressed in the unmistakable idiom of poetry. It is, perhaps, a garnish, rather than a disfigurement of the general texture of the composition in which it occurs. On the other hand, citations have frequently been made from Dickens of long passages written in an unbroken series of iambics—perfectly metrical. Yet no line could by any possibility happen into a production of Dickens that would be other than prose. Milton's prose, however, is incessantly "pawing to get free" from prose limitations. In general, it may, we think, be said that practice in verse tends to improve one's prose style, and that practice in prose tends to deprave one's faculty of verse. To the former of these two generalizations there are exceptions—to the latter, none, we believe.

Coleridge made as close an approach to a statement of the difference between poetry and prose as, perhaps, language admits of our making. He said good prose was proper words in proper places—poetry the best words in the best places. All but the most triumphant

prose passages allow the change of words here and there, and even the reconstruction of sentences, without any serious injury to the whole effect. Change a word, however, in any perfect line of poetry, and the spell of its power is broken. How often, if you have the talisman sense of poetry in you—how often have you hovered in memory over a verse that had lost its charm, for a wrong word in it somewhere, and felt a poet's pains almost over again till the right word came back into it, like a keystone to its arch, and made its strength and beauty perfect? Such being the difference between poetry and prose, what wonder that it is the poetry of the world that survives with its own uneffaced image and superscription immortally perfect, while almost all the prose goes surely back into the bullion of the general thought and knowledge of mankind? It is form that embalms a production of the mind. What do we care now for the question of Demosthenes's title to his civic wreath? But every age and every race of men have an unflagging interest in Demosthenes's manner of vindicating his title to it.

We hold it to be of the very first importance, in view of the radical difference thus shown to exist between poetry and prose as instruments of expression, that the poet, who would rank among the greater gods of his Olympus, should nurse his genius in the uninterrupted use of its own proper and peculiar language. He must lisp in numbers, and then speak in numbers, if he would have the numbers come. If he addicts himself to prose writing, one of two things, or both, will assuredly happen. Either he will affect the sensitive idiom of poetic expression with some alloy of its delicate purity, or else he will suffer some loss from perfect lubricity in the metrical flow of his language. Most probably both of these consequences will follow. Herein, we think,

lies a part, at least, of Mr. Lowell's mistake, or of his misfortune, as a candidate for the poet's highest apotheosis. He has written too little poetry, and he has written too much prose. For his own fame, and for our wealth in letters, he might better have thrown away half the verse he has printed, as the mere exercises of his genius trying and training its powers, and then have used the time and the strength that he has devoted to prose production in maturing the master poems which would fairly have represented his poetic capacity.

We doubt if there is a single great name in English literature that positively or negatively will not confirm these positions. Milton, for example, is reckoned, and justly, one of the chief masters of our English prose. How could that great mind be otherwise than great in whatever mode of utterance it might choose to speak? But then it is the significant fact both that his verse is often prosaic, and that his prose often breaks its mighty and numerous march with little fits of a movement which may be very fine indeed, but which, nevertheless, is not prose. Thus that extraordinarily nervous and that magnificent declamation of his, which is like Burke's, as far as the utterance of an essential poet can be like the utterance of an essential prose writer, but which is really like nothing else in the world, constituting a variety of literature by itself—Milton's prose, we say, recalls, with its reckless and resourceful headway, his own description of the progress of the fiend, who,

> O'er bog, or steep, through strait, rough, dense, or rare,
> With head, hands, wings, or feet, pursues his way,
> And swims, or sinks, or wades, or creeps, or flies.

Of course, no sensible person will think that we are undervaluing such composition. We are only describing it for the purpose of showing how even such a

genius as Milton could not master perfectly two instruments of expression so different as poetry and prose. Dryden is another of the traditionary names of renown in English letters. He might, perhaps, occur to the reader as one who united the two faculties of verse and of prose. He did write a noble prose, under the dominant influence of those masters of form in every kind, the French—but then he was born to be a prose writer; and, in strictness, he never was anything else, although he produced quantities of vigorous verse, which, in his day, was readily accepted for poetry. Pope wrote elegant verse and elegant prose. The faculty of numbers was so natural to him that nothing could spoil it. His prose practice, never very considerable, probably had no material effect on his facility in versification. And facility in versification was well nigh the only attribute of the poet that Pope possessed. The same might be said of Addison, a less facile versifier, and a less trim prose writer, though more various and more voluminous in prose than Pope. Burke was a genius of a very high order, essentially a prose writer. He is, perhaps, the most extreme instance that could be named of a prose writer whose temperament and whose imagination continually buoy him as if above the level of prose expression, yet without once making you afraid that he is going to leave it. His tread is as if he spurned the ground. But he never uses wings to fly, and the truth is he has no wings that he could use. Macaulay is another example of the essential prose writer. His prose marches like a numerous host. His verse is the same host marching to music, and hurried into a double-quick. There is no exchanged influence of idiom between the two, simply because the idiom is always the same, that of prose expression—on the whole, the most curiously perfect prose expression, con-

sidered purely as expression, to be found in our language. Campbell was a true poet, and he wrote melodious and spirited prose. Probably Campbell's prose gained from his use of verse. But not without proportionate loss to his verse. In the first place, his poetry flats a note here and there, and very often in some of his pieces. In the second place, his facility of poetical composition was so imperfect as to give occasion to one of Sidney Smith's most characteristic sallies. Campbell's poet-pains often obliged him to take to his bed after a successful stanza. Sidney Smith applied the formula: Campbell and his couplet were "doing as well as could be expected under the circumstances." Tennyson is almost alone among the poets in *never* flatting a note. Now that we think of it, we should not like to undertake the job of finding a flatted note in Shelley; or in Keats, perhaps. And these men are examples of nearly exclusive addiction to poetry. Of course, we do not mean that they are necessarily greatest among poets. But their poetry, whatever the degree of its merit, is at least unmixed poetry. Nothing occurs in it that is spoken in the idiom of prose. Thus much may suffice for illustration of our meaning. We are examining, be it remembered, the poetical recreations of a man who, probably, might have been a great poet.

"The Vision of Sir Launfal" contains that happy form of words which has gone into the current commonplace of poetical quotation—

> And what is so rare as a day in June?
> Then, if ever, come perfect days.

Mr. Lowell's quality is not such as to have enriched the commonplace books with many passages of similar popularity. The description of the ice-roof, built by

the brook to shield him from the winter cold is an exquisite specimen of moresque architectural fancy—fairily beautiful. The moral of the whole piece may be taken in either one of two contrasted ways—as wholesomely humane, or as polemically "humanitarian." We take it in the former.

That would be a very incomplete review of Mr. Lowell's poetry which should omit to take account of his witty and humorous verse. "The Biglow Papers" have enjoyed the unique fortune to attract transatlantic attention, as illustrating what foreign critics have been pleased to consider the American variety of literary drollery. They have accordingly been read and studied abroad with a sort of patronizing curiosity,[1] which might not unfitly be reckoned to exemplify that "certain condescension in foreigners" of which Mr. Lowell has himself treated, in a vein of badinage a shade too serious and too much aggrieved perhaps, in the "Atlantic Monthly." "The Biglow Papers," on the whole, have weighted their wit with such excess of pedantic learning, itself ceaselessly witty, to be sure, and saturated with Attic salt, and with such excess of Yankee provincialism emphasized, we think, beyond a just effect by phonetic cacography, as hardly to keep permanently afloat on the ever-shifting current of popular appreciation. The work is now, we judge, virtually unknown, except by name, to the new generation of readers that has arisen since it originally appeared. It would not be surprising if it should, however, continue to retain a certain antiquarian interest and value, as the

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[1] It must be doubtfully flattering to a man of Mr. Lowell's personal dignity and fine literary ambition to receive his honorary degree from Oxford qualified with an allusion to "The Biglow Papers," alone, as entitling him to the distinction.

best monument of an archaic provincial dialect, which the present literary mood of curious self-consciousness concerning it, on the part of the New England mind, proves to be already in process of passing away. Its wit, consummate as it is, does not possess the quality of appeal to universal human nature, irrespective of local and temporary condition, which has given to the "Hudibras" its singular tenacity of life.

The "Fable for Critics" at once foreclosed itself from a long date of currency by including so many names of authors whose chief hold on remembrance consists in being thus included. Its main interest lies in its continuous series of triumphs in versification, and its perpetual Aurora Borealis play of harmless wit. It is a feat rather than a work. It reads as if it might have been achieved under the genial stimulation of an admiring *coterie* of friends, with a wager laid that the poet should never change a rhyming word once written. Preternaturally witty as these works show Mr. Lowell capable of being in verse, they yet, we believe, will survive in a merely traditionary fame. The world is fond of laughing; but it likes to laugh at little cost of thought, and it does not want to laugh deep enough to disturb the comfortable sleeps of conscience.

We cross a wide gulf of contrast and come to a series of poems in the volume recently published, that entitled "Under the Willows." This name is taken from the leading poem in the collection, the "June Idyll" of the "Atlantic Monthly," under an *alias*. Before passing to the contrasted series of poems to which we allude, a cursory remark or two may be made on the poems that intervene. "Under the Willows" itself is full of insight, and instinct with beauty; but it is too rambling, and incoherent, and aimless in plan, to rank as a work of art. "Pictures from Appledore"

are remarkable for resourceful versification, and have, probably, some claim to be admired as powerful; but they contain so many Hudibrastic rhymes, or at least rhymes that are mere *tours de force*, and so many neologisms, and so many intense expressions, occasionally trending toward the disagreeable, that, upon the whole, we do not derive much pleasure from the series. Mr. Lowell's diction is, we think, apt to be disfigured by uses that either a surer taste or more painstaking attention would have excluded from his poetry. It is needless to give instances—they are too numerous and too palpable not to strike every reader. We have no doubt Mr. Lowell himself schooled his ear to accept them all, and we have no doubt Mr. Lowell's readers might succeed in doing the same. It is always a question how much ought to be trusted to the first instinct with respect to such points, and how much is justly to be deferred to the feeling that comes after familiarity with a word, or a phrase, or a construction. Certain it is, that the poem which offers no point at which you stick on the first reading, and assent to only after challenge and demur, is not apt to be of a very high order of merit. The presumption is that it does not contain any beauty, except that which lies upon the surface. And, on the other hand, a poem which has been thought out several strata down below the surface of obvious suggestion must almost necessarily present salient points of form not immediately acceptable to the cursory reader. Whether Mr. Lowell has justly hit the mean here must remain a matter of individual opinion. Our own opinion we have already expressed.

The series of related pieces, to which we now come, have a personal interest that is a part, and a large part, of their literary interest. They must be autobiographic in their reference, and if this is so they must refer to

the death of Mrs. Lowell. It complements the sad satisfaction which these melodious cries of anguish inspire to know that it was not the idealizing of the husband or of the poet alone that made the lost one worthy of being thus commemorated in song. Mrs. Lowell was to others also, we believe, what she seemed to Mr. Lowell. "The Wind-Harp" sounds a note prelusive to the four following poems, which, together, compose a tetralogy of musical sorrow, in which the sorrow is almost too much and too sharp for the music. "Auf Wiedersehen" is unspeakably tender with the "tender grace of a day that is dead." It is reminiscent of a parting scene between the two, at which, as Mr. Lowell says exquisitely, they "played at pain" in that sad-sweet transfigured past before they were married. Her half-doubtfully repeated "*Auf wiedersehen*," on that occasion, magnetic with meaning unexpressed, seems afterward to have become a talisman of memory between them, and it is the motive of the poem.

The second poem of the series has this occasion: the husband, left lonely by the loss of his wife, revisits the little gate where the heartsome German farewell was first spoken memorably by her, and there recalls the more recent parting

> when the weak
> And fading lips essayed to speak
> Vainly,—"We meet again!"

This second poem is beautifully entitled "Palinode." The vivid words just quoted occur in it. It deals with the forward distance, too, having prospect as well as retrospect.

The third poem follows, like a shriek of anguish that refuses to be sung. The very title has the hopeless wail of Electra in it. It is "After the Burial." The

desolate man sits down with despair, and almost angrily repels consolation:

> Communion in spirit! Forgive me,
> But I, who am earthy and weak,
> Would give all my incomes from dreamland
> For a touch of her hand on my cheek.
>
> That little shoe in the corner,
> So worn and wrinkled and brown,
> With its emptiness confutes you,
> And argues your wisdom down.

"The Dead House" takes its occasion from a visit to the dwelling where they had lived together.

* * * * *

> But, I think, the house is unaltered,
> I will go and beg to look
> At the rooms that were once familiar
> To my life as its bed to a brook.
>
> Unaltered! Alas for the sameness
> That makes the change but more!
> 'T is a dead man I see in the mirrors,
> 'T is his tread that chills the floor!
>
> To learn such a simple lesson,
> Need I go to Paris and Rome,
> That the many make the household,
> But only one the home?
>
> 'T was just a womanly presence,
> An influence unexprest,
> But a rose she had worn, on my grave-sod
> Were more than long life with the rest!

* * * * *

"A Winter-Evening Hymn to my Fire" is a piece of capricious fancy, prevailingly cheerful, as seemed to befit the theme, which, nevertheless, sinks at the close into this exquisitely pathetic cadence of memory and regret:

Thou sinkest, and my fancy sinks with thee:
For thee I took the idle shell,
And struck the unused chords again,
But they are gone who listened well;
Some are in heaven, and all are far from me:
Even as I sing, it turns to pain,
And with vain tears my eyelids throb and swell:

* * * * *

Earth stops the ears I best had loved to please;
Then break, ye untuned chords, or rust in peace!
As if a white-haired actor should come back
Some midnight to the theatre void and black,
And there rehearse his youth's great part
'Mid thin applauses of the ghosts,
So seems it now: ye crowd upon my heart,
And I bow down in silence, shadowy hosts!

This poem and the "Al Fresco," in the same volume, are kindred in motive and manner with some of Mr. Emerson's verse, which, however, seems to us to surpass Mr. Lowell's experiments in "lithe perpetual" elusive changefulness of fancy, and in successful expression. Mr. Emerson is a more natural pantheist than Mr. Lowell, and makes a better Magian.

Last in the volume, if the "L'Envoi" be excepted, comes the "Commemoration Ode," a poem recited on occasion of the exercises held at Harvard, in honor of the patriot dead who fell from among the alumni of the University during the war. This poem is to be held responsible for Mr. Bayard Taylor's recent "Dedication Ode" for the Gettysburg National Cemetery—a not infelicitous echo of the original. Mr. Lowell's "Commemoration Ode" is the most elevated in aspiration of all his poems, and the attainment, if not absolutely equal to the aspiration, is by no means unworthy of it. The ode scarcely escapes anywhere a certain localizing color, appropriate when you consider the occasion for which it was written, but a little embarrassing when

you are wishing to put the poem in the company of the greatest works of its class. The genius of the poet seems throughout to be striving in vain to expand a limited subject to heroic proportions. At least, the success is at no point positive success until we reach the episode of allusion to Abraham Lincoln. The prolonged strophe that constitutes this episode seems, indeed, the Kohinoor, to which all that precedes and all that follows is magnificent setting. There are almost no blemishes in the perfection of this noble passage. We quote it entire:

> Such was he, our Martyr-Chief,
> Whom late the Nation he had led,
> With ashes on her head,
> Wept with the passion of an angry grief:
> Forgive me, if from present things I turn
> To speak what in my heart will beat and burn,
> And hang my wreath on his world-honored urn.
> Nature, they say, doth dote,
> And cannot make a man
> Save on some worn-out plan,
> Repeating us by rote:
> For him her Old World moulds aside she threw,
> And, choosing sweet clay from the breast
> Of the unexhausted West,
> With stuff untainted shaped a hero new,
> Wise, steadfast in the strength of God, and true.
> How beautiful to see
> Once more a shepherd of mankind indeed,
> Who loved his charge, but never loved to lead;
> One whose meek flock the people joyed to be,
> Not lured by any cheat of birth,
> But by his clear-grained human worth,
> And brave old wisdom of sincerity!
> They knew that outward grace is dust;
> They could not choose but trust
> In that sure-footed mind's unfaltering skill,
> And supple-tempered will
> *That bent like perfect steel to spring again and thrust.*
> His was no lonely mountain-peak of mind,

Thrusting to thin air o'er our cloudy bars,
A sea-mark now, now lost in vapors blind;
Broad prairie rather, genial, level-lined,
Fruitful and friendly for all human kind,
Yet also nigh to heaven and loved of loftiest stars.
Nothing of Europe here,
Or, then, of Europe fronting mornward still,
Ere any names of Serf and Peer
Could Nature's equal scheme deface;
Here was a type of the true elder race,
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.
I praise him not; it were too late;
And some innative weakness there must be
In him who condescends to victory
Such as the Present gives, and cannot wait,
Safe in himself as in a fate.
So always firmly he:
He knew to bide his time,
And can his fame abide,
Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
Till the wise years decide.
Great captains, with their guns and drums,
Disturb our judgment for the hour,
But at last silence comes;
These all are gone, and, standing like a tower,
Our children shall behold his fame,
The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,
New birth of our new soil, the first American.

Such poetry as this makes one wish that somehow the customs of the republic could have devolved the task of building a national monument in verse, to the memory of Abraham Lincoln, upon a laureate poet like Mr. Lowell. An entire ode, of suitable length, inspired to the "higher mood" of this one strophe, would have been accepted by every race and every generation of men as a fit immortality for Lincoln's name, and as an adequate expression of the transformed heroic temper of the times that set him forth to the view of history. As it is, this brief passage will probably survive every-

thing else that has been written on the subject, and form, and nobly form, the destined traditional estimate of Lincoln's character.

We know of nothing else concerning Lincoln at once so genial and so just, so deep in penetration and so carefully happy in expression, so compact and so comprehensive, unless it be a little speech of Mr. Emerson's to his fellow-citizens at Concord, on the occasion of the assassination. We hope some biographer of Lincoln will take the pains to rescue this precious bit of prose from the oblivion that is always likely, almost certain, indeed, to overwhelm such chance-dropped words.

If we descend to verbal criticism (we are half-ashamed of ourselves not to be above it in the presence of workmanship so splendid) we are conscious of some slight disturbance of perfect satisfaction at coming upon coinages like "innative," "disvoiced"—coinages not so felicitous as to be their own sufficient vindication. "Brood" and "breed" are linked, by usage, with associations too ignoble to make them wholly agreeable in application to men. We can easily understand how Mr. Lowell may even have meant to flout a taste, judged effeminately finical, by using these very words. But it affects us as if it were a trick of language, rather than the natural utterance of a genuine quasi-scornful masculinity. It is to us a little flaw in the finish of the work to have "in't" made conspicuous by being matched for rhyme with "stint." Mr. Lowell has a weakness for compounding words, and this ode has not escaped. In the strophe quoted, it seems a false antithesis to say of an Homeric shepherd of the people that he

> loved his charge, but never loved to lead;—

a modesty characteristic enough of Lincoln, but hardly

so of an ideal shepherd. Was it in the highest key of "noble anger" to write the strophe beginning, "Who now shall sneer?" It strikes us as too much a condescension in a strain of passion so august and transcendent.

The strophe numbered "IX." attempted a very difficult achievement. The thought in it is sublime; and if the expression of the thought had been perfectly successful, the passage would be as noble as anything that we know of in the whole range of poetry. Perhaps there is a certain prolixity of expression, in the course of which the thought almost gets sublimated sheer away from us. What was it that embarrassed those strong wings, and hindered that aspiring flight from quite gaining its high goal? We believe that it was nothing but the lack of that hardness of vigor which only exercise gives. Original strength needs to have been trained long, by arduous use, in order to bring such soaring adventures fairly to their aim. The humored caprice of the close of the ode, the self-checking spirit of humility taking fresh headway again and bursting forth in a peal of joyful pride unrestrained, is quite like Tennyson's "Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington."

No other college in the country had the choice among its alumni of so many prominent names in poetry and in eloquence, to illustrate its patriotic memorial services, as had the University at Cambridge. The alumni of Harvard number a very large share of the chief reputations in our American republic of letters. This noteworthy disparity in favor of Harvard is to be accounted for, in part, by the antiquity of its foundation, and, in part, by its numerous list of graduates—but not wholly. Yale is nearly as old, and the number of its alumni is nearly as great. Yet the contrast between these two colleges, in respect to their proportion of

literary celebrities, is striking. We have been at the pains to run carefully over the catalogues of both from the year eighteen hundred down. We should say that Harvard outnumbers Yale, at least three to one, in names of eminent literary men. There must be reasons for this. One reason, perhaps, is found in the fact (it is a fact, we believe) that Yale drew its patronage, for many years, in greater proportion from the South; while Harvard recruited its classes more from New England, and especially from Massachusetts. Scholarship and literature were never the leading ambition of the ingenuous South; and, besides, New England, and by eminence Massachusetts, boys enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a far better preparatory training.

Another reason, however, we are compelled to believe, must lie in the different manner in which Yale and Harvard have manned their department of belles-lettres instruction. Second-rate abilities and second-rate culture cannot occupy the chair of rhetoric for a long series of years, at a seat of high education, without registering an appropriate effect in the intellectual character and development of the students. On the other hand, genius and accomplishments, like those of a Ticknor, a Longfellow, a Lowell (the illustrious triumvirate of recent succession in the chair of elegant literature at Harvard), cannot preside over the literary studies of a series of classes without impressing a corresponding character upon their intellectual development. It is a capital mistake for boards of college oversight to suppose that they have done the best for the literary education of young men, when they have provided them with an instructor who is willing to go through unlimited drudgery, in the way of minute rudimentary criticism of their essays with the pencil or the pen. Infinitely better, in our judgment, it would be for col-

lege classes, if their rhetorical teacher should even, save in exceptional cases, never once *see* the essays of their pupils. This is no place for discussing a point of education, and we cannot pause to vindicate our opinion. We scarcely state it, indeed. We baldly suggest it. Stimulus, more than criticism, is what the forming literary mind requires. Vigorous growth can better be trusted than the most laborious pruning-knife, to give symmetry of form. Besides, only vigorous growth responds to the pruning-knife with desirable results. The criticism that is applied should be living criticism —by which we mean oral criticism, in which the criticised writer himself should share as respondent, while the writer's classmates, under stimulating and regulating direction from the head of the department, should take a principal part in it. It is in some such way that the voluntary societies of a college manipulate their members; and many a student will testify that he is more indebted to their influence than to the influence of the regular instruction for the forming of his literary habits. This colluctant play of mental faculties in generous social exercise, is worth, for literary discipline, all the dead pen-strokes that could be strewn on a manuscript essay by the most industrious grammarian in the world. A teacher who can do, has done, is doing literary work of acknowledged value himself, provided always that it be with art, and not wholly by instinct, is the man to teach literary workmanship to college students. Such a man will not be a drudge. And such a man need not be. An ounce of stimulus here outweighs a ton of drill.

But while we thus attribute a deserved preëminence to Harvard University, for its share in the nurture of those minds which have hitherto represented American letters, a just deduction from its praise remains to be

made. The circle of culture which centres at Harvard has done little in the way of such production as is fitted both to endure itself and to produce its like again. Its work has been mainly epideictic work. Its history is likely to turn out more valuable as writing than as history. Its eloquence tends to be rhetoric rather than eloquence. Its poetry seems to be the echo of singing rather than song. As for its theology, that is the empty shell of negation, out of which the positive kernel of gospel has gone. Reverence, as a matter of religion, has mostly disappeared; the decorous affectation of it that remains is a matter of æsthetics. Self-complacency is the broadest trait that characterizes this school of culture. It is a very well-bred self-complacency, and it rallies itself with admirable pleasantry. But it is an evident token of shallowness. The end is easy to predict. The literary sceptre will surely depart from Boston. Puritanism gave the Boston mind a great launch. But the force of that launch will not last forever. New Boston will have to borrow vigor from an earnestness rooted in religion deeper than æsthetics, or the days of its literary dominion are numbered.

"An age too late" is, perhaps, Mr. Lowell's misfortune. The bracing moral atmosphere that blew down on an earlier generation, from the heroic heights of a more religious time, would have suited better with something in the man that allies him to an order of greatness, toward which the current Boston aspiration is no longer hospitable. Dr. Holmes is the perfectly-contented child of present Boston — furnished with a complete assortment of easy solutions for the problems that perplex nobler minds, and quite incapable of their unworldly sorrow. But when Mr. Lowell speaks in the dialect of this shallow complacency, he always seems, somehow, to be using a language that is not his

mother-tongue. He is haunted by doubts, and fears, and guesses, that are not dreamed of in the popular Boston philosophy. Puritanism would very likely have oppressed Dr. Holmes, and quite silenced his chirrup. But Puritanism might almost have made Mr. Lowell a lesser Milton. It is creditable to Mr. Lowell that his moral and his intellectual sympathies are in the noblest sense conservative. That heady radicalism in religion and in politics, which Boston calls progress, has long ago, we believe, left Mr. Lowell in the rear. His present aspect, if we do not mistake, is rather toward a past prematurely forsaken, than toward a future plucked at by rash hands before its "season due." Whatever mutations impend in literary judgment, Mr. Lowell, if one may venture without offence to anticipate the criticism of the future, will always be remembered as one of the greatest and best of that school of brilliant wits who contented themselves with making a transient eddy in the main current of intellectual human activity, the direction of which they might, perhaps, have influenced, and the volume of which they might have contributed, in some degree, to swell.

MR. LOWELL'S "CATHEDRAL."

WE judge from the delicate deprecation which seems to be conveyed in the dedicatory note to this little volume that Mr. Lowell's publisher constituted a kind of Amphictyonic Council in the case. But the compelling and, so, excusing decree does not appear to have extended further than to the material form which the work should assume. We may, therefore, gently proceed to bring the poem itself to the critical rack without impiety notwithstanding.

The publisher has done what a publisher could (and Mr. Fields has laid his vocation under debt by enlarging the bounds of publishing possibility) to conciliate a favorable judgment at sight. Besides the various enterprising expedients of public prepossession which he has employed with admirable address in the present behalf, the appearance of the volume is as dainty as sumptuous paper, fair type, liberal spaces, and tasteful binding can make it. The first choice of title is said to have been "A Day at Chartres." The change from this was made perhaps in part the better to justify the engravings prefixed of the cathedral doors and the cathedral interior, which add an obvious charm of art to the more recluse charm of the poetry. The engravings may be pronounced appropriate enough and beautiful enough to justify in turn the change in the title. The original title, however, "A Day at Chartres," would have been a better term of comprehension for the somewhat heterogeneous matter contained in the

poem. It would be difficult to devise any title sufficiently elastic to embrace very closely so capricious an outline of subject as the poem presents. The bookmaker has successfully contrived, by the extraordinary thickness of the paper, as well as by a lavish devotion of space, to reverse the motto according to which Mr. Lowell is fond of moulding his expression. If the verse contained in the book merits here and there the praise of being *multum in parvo*, certainly the book containing the verse constantly merits the praise no less of being *parvum in multo*.

We have recently bestowed an article of full length upon the claims of Mr. Lowell's poetry in general. Much, therefore, of that preliminary concession to his very high merits, which would otherwise be indispensable, may now be omitted at no risk of misunderstanding on the part of our readers. If we may say so without seeming to be brusque in the wish to be brief, we cannot but consider "The Cathedral" a hasty publication. It is perhaps not more crude than some other of his pieces, previously published, but its aim is comparatively ambitious, and the fame of the author has touched a mark so high, aligned from the "Commemoration Ode," that he is henceforth justly exposed to a severer judgment in contrast with himself. The effect, therefore, of precipitate printing becomes more painfully obvious. Nine years might have given us a very different poem from "The Cathedral" as we must now be content to accept it. We cannot but regret that Mr. Lowell did not resolutely allow his conception time to work itself clear of the many foreign and incongruous elements in it, both literary and religious, which, shut safely from the light in so sound a head and so pure a heart as his, would have been sure to stimulate a wholesome fermentation until they were finally rejected.

The suspicion is almost unavoidably suggested that Mr. Lowell's own captivating personal qualities are a snare to his genius. He becomes easily dear to a circle of brilliant and cultivated minds about him, who, fascinated in the glamour of his evidently transcendent gifts, are fain, perhaps, to burn an incense of generous praise to him so profuse and so near, that he finds it difficult to look steadily through the tinted and fragrant cloud immediately before him, and to see the off-lying world beyond, of the distant and the future, which, nevertheless, as it is needful to remember, pronounces lastly on each deed of the poet with judicial blindness to graces of personal character. We feel that Mr. Lowell is capable of producing far more valuable work than any that he has hitherto produced, or than any, we fear, that he is likely to produce hereafter. The case would be different if somehow the praise for which he labors could be farther removed in place as well as in time. The response of admiration close by may follow a feat of literary workmanship too soon. It is then anything but friendly to the highest accomplishments of genius. No friend, and no circle of friends, however illustrious in gift and in culture, can safely occupy to an author the place of the great community of minds unknown to him, which alone is the qualified and supreme arbiter of literary claims. It is a serious, indeed an irreparable, injury to the final fame of a man of genius, to have the disinterested general voice drowned to his ears in the genial applause of a personal audience. Such appreciation, to be sure, is a pleasant, and, within certain narrow limits, it may be a fruitful, stimulus. But it does not often enough mingle a bitter with its sweet, to be the vigorous tonic which every masculine genius requires in order to be put upon its noblest mettle.

Our remarks may not be justly applicable to Mr. Lowell's case. We guess, and make no pretence of revealing. But there are certain traits in this poem which have irresistibly forced these reflections upon us. It is not easy to conceive how a man of so much fine critical capacity as Mr. Lowell has more than once exercised, we believe, to the severe cost of an author that chanced to be of the Philistines in relation to "the peculiar people" of American literature—it is not easy, we say, to conceive how a taste so severe against the æsthetic lapses of others should have fallen into such sins of its own, except under the misleading influence of some friendly judgment, which was too complaisant to be wise. We instance that whimsical episode of extremely humble and obvious humor in the passage about the Englishmen whom the poet met at the inn in Chartres. If Mr. Lowell had had the conception of an impersonal and numerous audience in mind for his touchstone here, surely he would have hesitated before risking the smile at himself, as well as at his wit, which the passage was likely to provoke.

It may be to the life—but is it poetry, or is it anything short of fatal to poetry?—to speak of the typical American of the West as one

> Who, meeting Cæsar's self, would slap his back,
> Call him "Old Horse," and challenge to a drink.[1]

We submit that Hogarthisms in verse, like this, were

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[1] A whimsical justification of the grotesquenesses that swarm upon Mr. Lowell's "Cathedral" (attributed, with what truth we know not, to the poet himself), is the claim that such excrescences are in a fine and subtle harmony with the theme. The cathedral itself, from which the poem takes its name, was thus covered over with gargoyles and drolleries in shape of every sort. The poem simply overflows with *bizarre* conceits in the frolicsome spirit of the Gothic architecture in which the cathedral was built.

better relegated to "The Biglow Papers," or some other such limbo of literature uncertain whether serious or burlesque.

There is no doubt a spirit in which something like a part, at least, of what follows might be said with a kindly earnest sarcasm, and yet without affront to anybody that did not deserve to be affronted; Mr. Lowell fails of this spirit. A timely thought of the wider auditory at a distance that was listening to hear his verse, would have tended, we think, to correct this error in tone:

> Doubtless his church will be no hospital
> For superannuate forms and mumping shams,
> No parlor where men issue policies
> Of life-assurance on the Eternal Mind,
> Nor his religion but an ambulance
> To fetch life's wounded and malingerers in,
> Scorned by the strong.

We note it as significant that, skipping backward from this an interval of several pages, we come upon an acknowledgment by the poet of that idiosyncrasy of his upon which we remarked in an article of some months ago, namely, the "force of sympathy" in him; "or," as he modestly says, "call it lack of character firm-planted," which enables him at will (sometimes beyond his will?) to "dwell enlarged in alien modes of thought." It is professedly in the exercise of this versatile sympathy that he has been drawing the portrait of the American variety of the human being—overdrawing it, we think, in the wish to make it distinct. The portrait finished, the artist proceeds to "reshape" it as he "will"—giving us, for result, the ideal American of the future—his church, and his God. We are obliged, therefore, to consider this result to be moulded in part, indeed, according to Mr. Lowell's own choice; but we are fortunately at liberty to consider it

to be moulded also in part according to his artistic sense of the fitness of the case. We prefer to assume that the latter influence predominated. We may thus express ourselves more freely than would otherwise seem compatible with the respect which we desire to retain for Mr. Lowell. We are sorry that he did not vindicate himself from the blame of too much personal sympathy with his future American's raw religious notions, by a certain reprehension in his own manner of stating them. We repeat that a seasonable recollection of the general cultivated public that would like to enjoy his poetry might have saved him from this unhappy quest of a chord with a merely provincial religious taste.

The disagreeable words and metaphors that are crowded together in the foregoing citation, have a smack of the stale and the commonplace, not to say even of slang, in them, whereby, if we were shut up to consider them as reflecting Mr. Lowell's own mood, they would produce the effect, either of cant or of condescension to vulgar prejudice on his part, as little creditable to his literary taste as to his religious spirit. Mr. Lowell, speaking on the mixed behalf of his American and himself, does not explicitly say that the current evangelical religion is nothing but an ambulance to bring in life's wounded and malingerers, but he implies it, and he implies it in contempt. He implies it, too, almost as if he were vindicating the institution of Christ from an unworthy representation of it in the existing evangelical Churches. Now, assuredly, the Church of Christ, however it may be with Mr. Lowell's American Church of the future, is fulfilling a legitimate mission in trying to rescue the fallen and disabled. Christ may be trusted to know the errand on which he came. He says that his errand was to seek

and to save that which was lost. This errand he expressly committed in turn to his disciples. But the word "malingerers" introduces us into the presence of an unfamiliar classification. The gospel of the New Testament distinguishes no "malingerers." According to Jesus, we are all of us the "wounded." Some of us wounded, to be sure, have a strange whim of feigning to be perfectly sound. But there are no really sound ones, in Christ's view, that could dishonestly feign to be wounded. In the scheme of "The Cathedral," on the other hand, men appear set off into three different classes. There are the "wounded," the "malingerers," and "the strong." Mr. Lowell seems to imply that the strong at present remain outside, and scorn a Church composed of the recovered or recovering wounded, busy at no nobler work than that of succoring their prostrate brethren on the field. Does Mr. Lowell—we can with difficulty separate his own personality here—does Mr. Lowell, then, think that a Church so made up, and so employed, is a proper object of scorn? Is such a Church a proper object of scorn, even if, in excess of charity, it extends its care also, in some instances, to the hypocritical unworthy? Are "the strong," who need no help themselves, and who render no help to others, fitted, in virtue of this character, to administer precisely the quality of scorn which the nature of the case requires? And, in general, is scorn of the weak a fine trait of the strong? We should like to know what is to become of the weak when the Church of the strong is fully established. Will the weak be admitted? And will they still be the objects of scorn on the part of their vigorous brethren? The Church which Mr. Lowell foreshadows will have to be broad indeed if its membership is to constitute a happy family upon these terms.

But Mr. Lowell mistakes in imagining that the Church thus sketched will be a new Church. It will be a rehabilitation, not a replacement. It will not be progress. It will be nineteen centuries of retrogression. The Church of the strong is not a modern Church. It belongs to antiquity. More. It is pagan, not Christian. The god, too, that Mr. Lowell sets up for worship in it, resembles the very "brotherly" complaisant gods of Greek or Roman polytheism far more nearly than it (the neuter gender is Mr. Lowell's own, not ours, for it is a "divine *thing*," he says)—far more nearly than it resembles the Judæan Jehovah, who long since maimed their brute images, and, as we thought, shamed their worshippers. Our readers shall judge for themselves whether we do Mr. Lowell injustice. Here is the rest of the sentence which we partially quoted above:

> —yet he, unconscious heir
> To the influence sweet of Athens and of Rome,
> And old Judæa's gift of secret fire,
> Spite of himself shall surely learn to know
> And worship some ideal of himself,
> Some divine thing, large-hearted, brotherly,
> Not nice in trifles, a soft creditor,
> Pleased with his world, and hating only cant.

Is Mr. Lowell's own unconscious heirship to Greece and Rome incontinently betrayed? Or has he too carefully conformed his conception in obedience to the "influence sweet of Athens and of Rome," and inadvertently forgotten to throw in the due equivalent of "old Judæa's gift of secret fire?" His god has fallen curiously into the mould of the antiques. The roistering divinities who kept house on Olympus, admirably answer to his description. Indeed, this might well have been one of the identical experiments in invention by

which Mr. Lowell convinced himself "how little inventiveness there is in man." Observe: the Olympian gods were their worshippers' "ideals" of themselves; they were certainly "things," and they were as "divine" perhaps as it is fair to expect that men's ideals of deity modelled on themselves should be; pretty good fellows they were, too, which must be what Mr. Lowell means by "large-hearted"; they were "brotherly" enough to be admitted members on hospitable terms of any pious heathen family that wouldn't object to their taking a jovial brotherly freedom now and then; they were far indeed from being "nice in trifles." In representing God as a creditor towards man, Mr. Lowell must of course refer to debt in moral relations; and certainly Zeus and the rest of them were nobly slack enough here to deserve the praise of being "soft creditors." If not always absolutely "pleased with their world," they were not unreasonably out of humor with it. As for "hating only cant," we fear the parallel fails at this point; we do not think the Olympians were as particular as they might have been whether they were served with earnest, or with merely mock-earnest devotion. We should say that most probably the tribute which Mr. Lowell puts into the hand of his American to offer, would be as acceptable to them as that which is offered by Mr. Swinburne himself.

But we dignify this sort of thing too much. It does not merit our banter. Mr. Lowell himself would smile at us for our pains. He had no serious meaning when he wrote it. He could have had none. The passage under immediate notice, and all the related passages scattered through the poem, if we should regard them as expressive of the poet's genuine feeling, would become an impossible labyrinth. So regarded, they are perplexed in thought and in implication beyond all

hope of any human disentanglement. In this view, we would defy the most ingenious mind to get at a satisfactory analysis of the religious inculcation, or religious insinuation, or religious aspiration, of the poem. It has no analysis. It is confusion inextricably confounded. There is no evidence of real spiritual strife in it, on the part of Mr. Lowell, but as a mere matter of literary management the maze is manifestly a little too much for the poet himself. He appears bewildered in it, and lost. His vision is dazed by innumerable images reflected upon him, from every possible quarter in the whole heaven of hostility to evangelical religion, and he does not, as, for reasons of the artist he should, grasp, for the moment at least, some clew of positive belief or of positive disbelief even, to lead him out of his wilderness. If it were a case of sincere spiritual perplexity, the subject of it would deserve our respect, along with our compassion. We sympathize instinctively when we hear a soul benighted wailing in the voice of reverence and prayer:

—but what am I?
An infant crying in the night:
An infant crying for the light:
And with no language but a cry.

It wonderfully relieves our sympathy of its burden when berating takes the place of bewailing. At least, still to retain a claim upon our sympathy, the berating must proceed unmistakably from the vehement passion of an angry earnestness and a magnanimous scorn, such as was Carlyle's, for example, when Carlyle was in his first, "undegenerate days." In the absence of this justifying spirit, its simulated language too easily degenerates into an insufferable something, for which we think of no respectful name. The literary error then seems to

transcend the religious. We willingly allow Mr. Lowell's American to become his scape-goat. We pronounce the literary and the religious sin upon his head, and speed him off to his wilderness. The scape-goat is gone from our hands, and it would not perhaps have been fair to discharge upon him the indignation that we conceive, mingling with the predominant less complimentary emotion, when, in the conclusion of the passage, the cross of Christ is dragged down from the mount of atonement by blood, and set up amid the tumbling chaos of transcendentalism, pantheism, universalism, scepticism, and paganism which are involved in Mr. Lowell's representation of the future American's theology, to stand as an empty "type of shame to homage turned," apparently for no other purpose than that of giving the picture completeness and relief.

We illustrate and confirm the minor strictures which we have to make, by a few examples. Let the following citations show what injudicious freedoms in diction Mr. Lowell indulges:

> Cloudless of care, *down-shod* to every sense.
>
> Ere yet the child had *loudened* to the boy.
>
> The *invitiate* firstlings of experience.
>
> I was a poacher on their *self-preserve,*
> Intent constructively on *lese-anglicism.*

(The last line is unmetrical, prosaic, and the pair, we fear, is commonplace, unless its ingenious neologisms save it from that extreme reproach.)

> By throngs of strangers *undisprivacied.*
>
> Keen-eyed for every chink of *undisguise.*
>
> Spume-sliding down the baffled *decuman.*
>
> Of men *invirile* and *disnatured* dames.

One fault involves another so naturally in verse, that we find it difficult to distribute our examples. We accordingly give them, without classification, and necessarily for the most part without connection or comment. We must trust to the sense of the reader to distinguish the more negative fault of mere prosaicism or commonplace among the obtrusive sins of too familiar language, scolding, innuéndoes, or simple disagreeableness in words.

> *Even as I write* she tries her wonted spell.
>
> I know not how it is with other men.
>
> And wiled the bluebird to his *whiff* of song.
>
> One morn of autumn *lords it o'er* the rest.
>
> Shoved in for Tarsus and *hitched back* for Tyre.
>
> A dish warmed-over at the feast of life,
> And finds Twice stale, served with whatever sauce.
>
> The flies and I its only customers.
>
> I seem to have heard it said by learned folk
> Who drench you with æsthetics till you feel
> As if all beauty were a ghastly bore,
> The faucet to let loose a wash of words.
>
> Ovid in Pontus, puling for his Rome.
>
> Far up the great bells *wallowed* in delight.
>
> Each age must worship its own thought of God.
>
> With subsidence continuous of the dregs.

(Pronounce the word subsidence properly, and scansion is impossible.)

> For, though not recreant to my fathers' faith,
> Its forms to me are weariness, and most
> That drony vacuum of compulsory prayer,
> Still pumping phrases for the Ineffable,
> Though all the valves of memory gasp and wheeze.

In this brown-fisted rough, this shirt-sleeved Cid.

We, too, build Gothic contract-shams, because
Our deacons have discovered that it pays,
And pews sell better under vaulted roofs
Of plaster painted like an Indian squaw.

I fear not Thy withdrawal; more I fear,
Seeing, to know Thee not, hoodwinked with dreams
Of signs and wonders, while, unnoticed, Thou,
Walking Thy garden still, commun'st with men,
Missed in the commonplace of miracle.

Contrast the discordant notes of ill-timed insinuation that grate upon the spiritual sense of the reader in the invocation from which the last preceding extract is taken, at the close of "The Cathedral," with the faultless tone of reverence and humility and charity that makes the proëm to the "In Memoriam" the perfection of literary art. The difference may not be a moral difference between the two poets; but if not, then the difference in artistic faculty, or in artistic fidelity, is truly immense.

We set off against these unfavorable quotations a few of the felicities which go far toward retrieving, though they cannot retrieve, the compromised fortune of the poem.

The line,

Illuminate seclusion swung in air,

describes the fresh flower-bell lightly hung, as if unsupported, in the buoyant atmosphere, and secluding the "buccaneering bee" in a golden room, whose walls flush the admitted sunshine with radiant color of their own. This line had to us a sudden and singular, an almost phenomenal beauty, when it first met our eye. The instantaneous springing into existence before us of the thing described could hardly have had a more vivid and surprising effect of delight.

No falcon ever felt delight of wings
As when, an eyas, from the stolid cliff
Loosing himself, he *followed his high heart*
To swim on sunshine, masterless as wind;

Unconscious perverts of the Jesuit, Time.

* * the calm Olympian height
Of ancient order feels its bases yield.

As sometimes, just ere sleep seals up the sense,
We hear our Mother call from deeps of time,
And, waking, find it vision,—none the less
The benediction bides, old skies return.

These quotations are too few to represent fairly the better side of the poem, but our limited space forbids us to add to them.

We have thought it not best to follow the general example, in suffering the blemishes which disfigure this poem to go unremarked. We have admired the more than exemplary meekness with which the religious press have received Mr. Lowell's thrusts at orthodox theology. We have actually seen the most offensive of these thrusts quoted in full in a well-known monthly repertory of periodical literature devoted especially to the interests of evangelical religion—and that not only without rebuke, but with extravagant editorial laudation of the poem, as the highest effort of American genius. A little more vigilance, or a good deal more independence, is loudly demanded at the hands of our journalistic custodians of literature and religion. Mr. Lowell, in virtue, partly, of his merit, but in virtue, as much, of his fortune, is likely to exercise no inconsiderable influence in setting the fashion of our current literary period. Alike in the interest of literature, and in the paramount interest of religion, it is important that faithful criticism should interpose its part to render that influence entirely wholesome and pure. American

letters ought not to be surrendered for even a moment, by default, to the unchastised sovereignty of a school of culture that should learn from Mr. Lowell, as master, to commit his mistakes upon principle, in the false conceit that they were thereby making their productions somehow more natural, or more original, or more manly, or more distinctively American. It is not necessary to coin outlandish words, to use vulgarisms, to be querulous, to be unmetrical, to be obscure, to introduce prosaicisms, to risk commonplaces, and to slant at evangelical religion, in order to be a true American poet. Bryant is not guilty in any of these things, and the young gods may be born, but they have not published their poetry, that are to take away Bryant's crown of easy supremacy among American poets.

Mr. Fields, we conclude, upon the whole, may have acted as a wise publisher in making a book of "The Cathedral." He, no doubt, acted also as a loyal, but not, we think, as a wise friend to Mr. Lowell, in thereby challenging a separate and serious criticism of the poem.

MR. LOWELL'S PROSE.

FOR several reasons, Mr. Lowell's prose, as well as his poetry, has almost altogether missed, hitherto, the homage of that sincere and serious criticism which alike his real merits, in either kind of composition, and the high rank to which the general consent of enlightened opinion has advanced him, should seem to have demanded. When he first began to publish, now nearly one whole literary age ago, he was greeted by the powers of criticism that then were with a certain condescension of notice, magisterial, to be sure, in tone, but kindly, as exercised toward a young man personally well known to his censors, and affectionately regarded by them, of whom good things were justly to be expected in the future, but to whom it would meantime be premature to pay the compliment of a very thorough examination of his claims to permanent regard. There followed a considerable period of nearly unbroken silence on the part of Mr. Lowell, during which a tradition of his genius and accomplishments made the tour of cultivated minds, traveling outward from Boston through the slowly widening circle of the fellowship of American letters.

By the time that he appeared again in print, Mr. Lowell had thus an assured welcome of generous acclamation already awaiting him from every organ of

critical opinion in the country. There seemed nothing in the circumstances of his fortune as an author to create any diversion against him. His quality was manifestly not popular enough to make him an object of jealousy with his peers in authorship. He was just sufficiently removed from obvious and easy comprehension to become a good shibboleth of culture and insight among the critics of the periodical press. Something, too, of that personal impression of the man, which seems to be inseparable from the effect produced upon us by the work of the author, accompanied, to assist Mr. Lowell in his easy conquest of the most formidable and most influential critical appreciation that as yet had a voice in the current American literature. It speedily became a point of literary patriotism with us all to swear a loyal and enthusiastic oath by the wit, the learning, and the genius of our brilliant fellow-countryman.

By a curious coincidence, too—lucky for the recent immediate spread of his fame—it happened that Mr. Lowell's latest and most important publications appeared at that precise juncture of our international relations with Great Britain when paramount public considerations were operating to disarm British criticism for the moment of its natural and traditional suspicion respecting American books, and even to dispose it to a lavish literary hospitality toward whatever of American production might seem most likely to be generally accepted among us as representative of the national genius and culture. Mr. Lowell was obviously the favorite of American literary men. English periodicals could not fail to gratify the American public by praising their chosen literary representative. Accordingly English organs of criticism were found, for instance, eagerly pronouncing the "Commemoration Ode" a great poem

(which it scarcely escaped being indeed), but without so much as hinting faintly that the retorted sneer in it at the Old World, and especially Great Britain, was perhaps an artistic mistake, which nevertheless it may easily appear even to Mr. Lowell's sympathizing countrymen to be. It has thus resulted that the verdict without discussion which American criticism had spontaneously passed upon Mr. Lowell, now stands doubly established in the apparently justifying and confirming accord of English opinion. By consequence, could a poll of the best instructed and most controlling editorial suffrages of the country be taken on the question to-morrow, the well-nigh unanimous sentence would pronounce Mr. James Russell Lowell, upon the whole, beyond controversy, if not the first, then certainly the second, among living American literary men.

We state the fact. We make no quarrel with it. Our own judgment might not be different. We merely point it out in explaining how it is that Mr. Lowell has failed so long of that faithful and unprepossessed criticism of his work, to which by his unenvied though enviable eminence he is justly entitled. We herewith offer the initiative[1] of such a criticism, with regard to Mr. Lowell's prose.

The first remark to be made about Mr. Lowell's prose concerns the kind in literature to which it belongs. It is not creative; it is critical. It is that in respect to other men's literary productions which this

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[1] Exception to this implication ought perhaps to be made in favor of a tentative article published some months ago in "Lippincott's Monthly," which made several good critical points unfavorable to Mr. Lowell, and sustained them well, but which, whether deservedly or not, incurred in certain quarters where jealous susceptibility on such a point was natural and was pardonable, the accusation of personal unfriendliness to the illustrious author.

article aims to be in respect to Mr. Lowell's own productions in prose. It appreciates, and, except incidentally, it does not originate. We say this without intending comparative disparagement of that species of literary work to which in his prose Mr. Lowell has almost exclusively devoted himself; although it is perfectly obvious that criticism makes a humbler claim than creation on the gratitude and reverence of the reader toward the author. While, however, late literature has names like M. Sainte-Beuve in France, Mr. Matthew Arnold in England, and Mr. Lowell (as a prose writer) in this country, to show among those who contentedly accept the vocation of critic, criticism, still justly adjudged to remain subordinate in rank to creation, may yet be admitted to confer degrees of greatness upon its servants higher perhaps than any but the highest of all.

The one thing, however, that concerns us in classifying Mr. Lowell's prose productions as criticism, is to settle the rule by which he may fairly be judged. He is a critic. Fair criticism asks, Is he a good critic? Is he adequately qualified, and has he made adequate use of his qualifications?

Large knowledge of literature is among the necessary qualifications of a good critic. In literature, as in everything, comparison and contrast are our best, almost our only means of just estimation. Critical faculty goes for nothing without adequate material of information upon which to have exercised itself beforehand, and from which now to form its present appraisals. No one can read Mr. Lowell's prose, or for that matter his poetry either, without acknowledging his wide familiarity with literature, both vernacular and foreign. Culture, in this sense of it, flavors every page of his writings. Allusion, near or remote,—often, it must be

admitted, remote,—lurks in almost every one of his sentences. So much indeed is this the case, that it is often a task to all but readers tolerably well informed themselves to track his hiding sense with certainty. We have been told on excellent authority that so well-informed a gentleman, for instance, as the head of Harvard University presumably is, was obliged to resort to Mr. Lowell himself to find out what his friend meant by a word in his poem of "The Cathedral" felicitously coined to convey an allusion to a usage of the Latin poets that happened not to be present to the learned president's mind at the moment of his reading the piece. Mr. Lowell certainly does not lack discursive acquaintance with literature to qualify him for his office of critic.

A second necessary endowment of the good critic is a capacity on his part of entering into the thought and feeling of another, without such accompanying prepossessions of his own as unconsciously to modify his new investiture by exchange and confusion of the separate individualities. This trait, the most amiable and generous of the critic's intellectual traits, Mr. Lowell evidently estimates at its true high value. He betrays everywhere a becoming anxiety to realize in himself so necessary a condition of satisfactory critical work. The success, perhaps, hardly corresponds with the anxiety. Still the fluent lapse from mood to mood in sympathy with his author which Mr. Lowell achieves or undergoes (is it active, or is it passive?) in his capacity of critic contrasts wonderfully say with the iron rigidness of Lord Macaulay's persistency in uniformly remaining himself, of whomsoever he may chance to be discoursing in ostensible criticism. Lord Macaulay, however, it ought in judgment of him to be remembered, seemed himself not unaware of his own incapacity for dealing

with any but those literary men whose work, like their critic's, was all of it done with heavy crayon strokes. But it is already an anachronism to mention Lord Macaulay as a critic, incomparable stylist though he is within his own chosen sphere of straightforward, dogmatic, all-British expression. Mr. Lowell's "false motions," unconsciously false, toward renouncing himself for the sake of temporarily becoming his author, are everything, at least in the way of acknowledgment, that could reasonably be expected of a critic.

It is manifest, however, that there must be a check set somewhere to this genial capacity on the critic's part of commingling consciousness with his author. And accordingly, a further qualification of the ideal critic is an assured and tranquil abiding on his part in certain well-defined principles of literary art, and certain fixed standards of literary judgment, which he is willing, indeed, in accordance with that sensitive sympathy just spoken of, to hold suspended, as it were, from their influence for a time, while he is adequately comprehending his author—but to which he instinctively and infallibly returns in the end for pronouncing his ultimate decision. It will, we think, upon reflection, be conceded as very conspicuous among the manifold qualifications which the confessed most exquisite contemporary critics unite in themselves—this inexhaustible capacity on their part of resilient return to their unaltered and unforgotten postulates of criticism after prolonged intervals of discursion, during which their readers will very likely have quite lost all idea of their reckoning amid the genial and companionable and sympathetic delayings of their guides in the society of the subjects of their criticism. How surely M. Rénan, M. Sainte-Beuve, Mr. Matthew Arnold, Professor Seeley find their anchoring-ground again and

ride at ease with buoys on every side about them after the most distant and most devious cruises along-side of their authors to antipodal shores. In this capital qualification of the critic, Mr. Lowell seems to us to be comparatively wanting. He is apt to drift, when he parts company with his convoy and ceases to cruise. He forgets his way back to his roadstead. Or rather he seems hardly to have a roadstead. The ocean is not too wide for his keel, and a new hail and a fresh cruise with still other company are always better to him than the return. In plain language, Mr. Lowell's present sympathy on a given occasion prevails too often over what were else his permanent convictions. His convictions, alike in literature, in ethics, and in religion, flow too easily. We speak purely from the point of view of the literary artist. It is essential for the critic himself that his convictions should stand firmly enough to be sighted, from time to time, at his need, in order that his criticism be not capricious, but judicial—at least that it be consistent with itself. It is equally essential, too, for the critic's readers that they should be able to recognize his ultimate convictions, in order on their part to apply that co-efficient of modification to his judgments without which his judgments are comparatively valueless to them. The critic's view is very well, but we need to know also his point of view.

Such seem to be the indispensable parts of the good critic's equipment, the moral quality of candor being of course presupposed. But it adds a grace and a power which we very unwillingly miss, if the critic have likewise the ability and the industry, perhaps we should add, the opportunity, to write his criticisms in a style so good as itself to illustrate a high literary art. Of Mr. Lowell's ability to do this, or at least to have done it, there is scarce a period of his prose that does

not seem to imply indubitable proof. It is very much to be regretted, both for the sake of his example and for the sake of his fame, that his ability should not have been better supported by his industry or by his opportunity. If we should admit that the published collections of Mr. Lowell's prose contain passages of such writing as the future will not willingly let die, this utmost concession, in accordance with our own strong wish half bribing our judgment, yielded to his more injudicious admirers' pretensions on his behalf, would still be niggardly concession compared with that which we feel it was quite within his privilege to extort from the most grudging among the critical adjudicators of his literary claims. Almost all the elements of a masterly style are present here, but "in their pregnant causes mixed confusedly" rather than marshalled in the fair order and decorum of a finished creation. In truth we know few volumes in the world of literature that own the *disjecta membra* of so much abortive possibility, one can hardly call it endeavor, in literary art. We read, and are dazzled in the splendor of such coruscant light. The heaven seems ablaze with comets and meteors and the matter of stars. We instinctively say, What an orb were here if only there were at hand the central force to gather and to globe this wasteful play of brilliancy! If Mr. Lowell had printed copious notes and studies of essays, and if these notes and studies had made the present volumes, then what triumphs of English composition for the instruction and delight of many generations might not have been anticipated when the essays themselves, in their ordered and proportioned completeness and unity, should follow. Mr. Lowell has been, we suspect, more generous to us than just to himself. He has indeed given us notes and studies of essays. Alas, that we must not look for the essays!

The opportunity or the inclination fails to him. Let us not be ungraciously thankful.

The faults which we find in Mr. Lowell's style are serious. They are such, too, as take hold of the thought not less than of the expression of the thought, which is equivalent to saying that we use the term style in its largest significance. The chief fault, and the parent one, is a singular lack of total comprehension and organic unity in his grasp and treatment of subjects. We thus name a fault of which it would perhaps be unfair to complain in an author of Mr. Lowell's just comparative degree in the scale of native endowment. It requires a measure, not necessarily a large measure, but a measure, greater or less, of real original power in a writer to take the master's supreme possession of his material, and produce it in a fresh creative form of his own. But if this high gift has been denied to Mr. Lowell, it still does seem fair to hold him responsible for maintaining at least that certain decorous harmony of tone in this work, from which no qualified criticism will dispense even a confessedly derivative authorship. Grant that Mr. Lowell could not conceive and create a symphony of his own. With suitable self-denial and patience and care, he might have avoided introducing injurious original discords while re-arranging and adapting for his variations from the symphonies of others. This fault he does not avoid, and, accordingly, *want of firm and harmonious tone* is to be named as the leading vice of his style.

This vice is not a casual, it is a characteristic vice. It affects the value of all Mr. Lowell's prose work alike in matter and in manner. It clings like an inseparable co-efficient almost everywhere, and it reduces the value of each term that it enters to zero. It spoils his criticism for authority, and it spoils his manner for model.

Nor is it a sole, a sterile vice. Its true name rather is Legion. It nourishes a numerous progeny of lesser vices, such as extravagances of statement, inconsistencies of critical judgment, undignified condescensions to words and images that we hesitate to stigmatize as vulgar only because Mr. Lowell uses them — allusions brought from too far and serving too little purpose, wit out of season, or even in a questionable taste, archaisms, neologisms, notes of querulousness, sentimentalisms, unconscious adoptions of thought from other authors, obtrusions of learning, ill-jointed constructions, and very frequent grammatical negligences. We shall not fail to furnish instances by which our readers may try the justness of our strictures. But this incidentally, or in its proper order.

The series of papers entitled "Library of Old Authors" illustrates perhaps more strikingly than any other portion of these volumes the profuse literary learning of their author. The papers now referred to are not very lively reading for the general public. But they do not lack spice, we should say, for several of the editors to whom Mr. Lowell pays his attentions. It is no doubt a true service to the interests of sound literature for a good critic, even at some expense of feeling to himself, to expose now and then the impostures or the hallucinations of pretentious literary incompetency. Mr. Lowell's learning, at all events, appears here to better advantage than it does, for instance, when thrusting itself forward in such a note as the following, which the critic subjoins to a page of his essay on Pope ("My Study Windows," p. 388):

"I believe it has not been noticed that among the verses in Gray's 'Sonnet on the Death of West,' which Wordsworth condemns as of no value, the second—

And reddening Phœbus lifts his golden fires—

is one of Gray's happy reminiscences from a poet in some respects greater than either of them :—

> Jamque *rubrum* tremulis jubar *ignibus erigere alte*
> Cum cœptat natura.—*Lucret.*, iv. 404, 405."

The italics are Mr. Lowell's. The general reader will better understand the violence and barrenness of the parallel with the meaning of the Latin before him (we make our italics correspond with Mr. Lowell's:) "And now when Nature hastens to *uplift on high* her radiance *ruddy* with tremulous *fires*." That Gray's line is one of his poorest is sufficiently certain, whatever Wordsworth's opinion. The "Phœbus" and the "reddening" unkindly mixed with "golden" are not in Gray's own taste, but in the false taste of the period, and they chiefly are what gives its individual character to the pinchbeck verse. On the other hand, Lucretius has no "Phœbus," and he does not make a "reddening" sun lift "golden" fires. The "tremulous" imparts far more of their peculiar quality to the verses of Lucretius than do the stock words which Mr. Lowell italicizes. We make no doubt that so practiced a handler of books as Mr. Lowell would cheerfully undertake, with the assistance of suitably indexed editions of the chief poets of every human language, to find parallels for Gray's line, in all of them without exception, at least equally happy with the one which he has chanced upon in Lucretius. The whole note, occupying nearly a page of the book, displays all the chief traits which Mr. Lowell himself burlesques in the Reverend Homer Wilbur, A.M. The reader who remembers "The Biglow Papers" almost looks to see the initials "H. W." appended to this note—the inconsequence, the irrelevance, and the pedantry in it rise so nearly to the degree of the burlesque. We seem to have an explanation of the fact that the commentary by Rev. Mr. Wil-

bur which accompanies Mr. Biglow's papers produces often a depressing rather than an enlivening effect upon the reader. The author of the travesty does not separate himself sufficiently from his work. We cannot quite make up our minds to be heartily amused with Mr. Wilbur, lest in so doing we should be enjoying ourselves partly at Mr. Lowell's expense.

We have, however, to remember that it has been in the path of Mr. Lowell's professional pursuits as well as of his personal aptitudes and tastes to read and study literature as a specialty. His engagements as editor of various volumes in the series of "The British Poets," published by Little & Brown, were no doubt further helpful to his large acquisitions in the learning of literature. It may be conjectured that a large share of all Mr. Lowell's essays, before their apotheosis in the form of books, did double service as lectures to university classes and as articles in reviews. This probably accounts for the exchange of the reviewer's "we" and the lecturer's "I" in the same essay—as frequently in "Shakespeare Once More." Passages of the lecture that were dropped in the article have been restored in the essay. In the haste of editing, Mr. Lowell neglected to make his personal pronouns uniform. We hazard our conjecture.

In the "Library of Old Authors," poor Mr. W. C. Hazlitt in particular (grandson, we believe, of William Hazlitt, Coleridge's contemporary), one of the editors of the books reviewed, has the misfortune to serve Mr. Lowell as foil for the display of his merciless learning, and as target for the practice of his wit. Mr. Lowell does not often make quarry of a man, but when he does so, he has ready talons and an eager beak. We think we enjoy assisting at the spectacle when a supposably well-to-do living man like Mr. W. C.

Hazlitt is the victim, better than when the victim is a dead man on whom the public neglect had already inflicted a punishment that asked no posthumous blow to make it either condignly severe or wholesomely instructive. We cannot help feeling that the essay on James Gates Percival was superfluous practice.

Mr. Lowell's ambition of displaying a faculty for various sympathetic appreciation is everywhere illustrated. He treats, for instance, of a poet, whom he, at least, would assuredly wish to consider the most antithetic in intimate quality to himself, and seems to like him so well and to find so much in him, that the sworn admirers of the critic confess their astonishment at the judgment which he pronounces on his subject. There is in reality no occasion of astonishment. Mr. Lowell does in this case as he does in the case of every author that he criticises. He submits Pope as if to the tests of his own individual and independent analysis. You may anticipate a wholly fresh, and perhaps in some respects novel judgment of his author. But that is because you are not familiar with Mr. Lowell's invariable method. He ends, as it was certain from the beginning that he would end, by re-affirming at large, after his own vacillating fashion, the well-established verdict in which several ages of criticism have issued—criticism justly divided between ascription and denial to Pope's unique and deservedly still flourishing fame. John Dryden again, in the too eager overflow of his critic's sympathy with him, narrowly escapes, if he escapes, the dangerous honor of being assigned a rank above Milton. For in his essay on "Dryden," Mr. Lowell says that by general consent, which he himself passes unchallenged, Dryden stands at the head of the English poets of the second class, and in "Shakespeare Once More," he elaborately proves that Milton was a

second-class poet. But Mr. Lowell needs only to devote an essay to Milton in order to do Milton the amplest justice. It is his way to be wholly occupied with being generous in praise or in blame to the particular author under review.

The course of reasoning employed to demonstrate that Milton is not simply inferior to Shakespeare, but in an inferior class, is not new with Mr. Lowell, although he "ventures" to propose it. It consists in asserting as major that no first-class genius can be "successfully imitated." Milton has been successfully imitated. Therefore, etc. Mr. Lowell expressly says that Milton[1] left behind him "whole regiments uniformed with all [his] external characteristics." We hardly know in the first place what Mr. Lowell considers "successful imitation," and in the second place what he considers the "external characteristics" of a poetry. It is certain that Milton was sufficiently individual and sufficiently novel in manner to be capable of imitation and to attract it. But it was imitation after a sort. We should say decidedly *not* "successful imitation." Who is it that has written in Milton's "tone?" For it is "tone," as Mr. Lowell truly says, that distinguishes the master. But "tone" is not an "external characteristic," Mr. Lowell would reply. Agreed. Is then the harmony of the versification an

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[1] We quote here the entire sentence: "Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, left no heirs either to the form or [to the] mode of their expression; while Milton, Sterne, and Wordsworth left behind them whole regiments uniformed with all their external characteristics." Compare with this whimsical dictum what Coleridge says (Works, vol. iv, p. 292, Am. ed.): "In this [that is, in 'style'] I think Dante superior to Milton; and his style is accordingly *more imitable than Milton's*"—which implies in our opinion a far more rational view of what constitutes a style imitable, than the critical crotchet adopted by Mr. Lowell.

"external" characteristic? Mr. Lowell would assuredly have to admit that it is. For our own part, we should be at a loss to guess what could be called an external characteristic of a poetry, if the peculiar harmony of its versification could not. But Collins, Mr. Lowell elsewhere says, revived in his verse the harmony that had been silent since Milton—that is, half a century or more. How is it then that Milton "left behind him whole regiments uniformed with *all* his external characteristics?" We are at a stand to reconcile Mr. Lowell with himself. It might be natural to suspect that he meant a characteristic so wholly external as the diction of the poet. But this characteristic is expressly excepted by Mr. Lowell. For he is contrasting Milton with Shakespeare, be it remembered, and he implicitly acknowledges that Shakespeare might be imitated in his vocabulary. It is Shakespeare's "tone" he says that is inimitable. We ask again, who has successfully imitated Milton's "tone?" And does not Mr. Lowell's labored demonstration of the difference of class between Milton and Shakespeare resolve itself at last to this—that it is only in his "tone," (tone being admitted the most interior and most substantive thing in style,) that Shakespeare is inimitable, and that it is only in his "external characteristics" at most that Milton has been successfully imitated. Here is the argument arranged in propositions according to their logical sequence: Shakespeare is of the first class, because he cannot be imitated. Milton is of the second class, because he can be imitated. Only Shakespeare perhaps can be imitated in some of his external characteristics. But Milton has been imitated in some of his external characteristics. Shakespeare however is absolutely inimitable in "tone," whereas Milton, for aught that appears, is also inimitable in "tone." Therefore Shake-

speare is a first-class poet, and Milton a poet of the second class—*q. e. d.* But Mr. Lowell's logic has the habit of smiling in a superior way at wide gulfs between premise and conclusion.

Mr. Lowell goes so far as to say that no writer has ever reminded him of Shakespeare by the gait of a single line. So strong a statement may be true in Mr. Lowell's individual case, but why then should he not be able without hesitation to pronounce absolutely his decision, whether a given line occurring in one of Shakespeare's plays be spurious or not? Yet Mr. Lowell in a note says of a passage quoted in the text: "This may not be Shakespeare's." He at least should be certain. Meantime Barnfield's lines stand in Shakespeare's text without offending the sense of homogeneity in the most of us, and the critical world will not have done disputing whether "Titus Andronicus" be Shakespeare's or not. But we meant merely to illustrate the extent to which Mr. Lowell's desire of sympathizing with his author is likely to influence him.

In the course of the minor discussion upon which we have now been remarking, we light upon a sentence that happens to be on several sides illustrative both of the excellences and of the defects of Mr. Lowell's style. The general tenor of the text at this point involving a comparative disparagement of Milton in favor of Shakespeare, the critic interposes a parenthesis of concession to the noble qualities of the Puritan poet, by way at once of attesting his own capacity of adequate appreciation, and of thus the more effectively setting his present Magnus Apollo in advantageous relief. He says: "I know that Milton's manner is very grand. It is slow, it is stately, moving as in triumphal procession, with music, with historic banners, with spoils from every time and every region, and captive epithets, like

huge Sicambrians, thrust their broad shoulders between us and the thought whose pomp they decorate."

By how narrow a margin does such writing as this miss of matching the magnificence of its subject! Certainly it shows, what hardly needed the showing, that Mr. Lowell enters with heart into the appreciation of Milton's verse, at least in its external characteristics. It almost makes one doubt whether, if Mr. Lowell were cited to swear by his conscience (and were able to do so with certainty of being right) concerning his own individual preference as between Milton and Shakespeare, disenchanted of influence from current conventional tastes, he would not have honestly to confess that he himself enjoys Milton's poetry more than he enjoys Shakespeare's. This suggestion is perhaps gratuitous, and we certainly do not press it, but with it agrees well the peculiar genius of Mr. Lowell's own composition, which often accomplishes its choicest effects, as he says Milton's poetry habitually does, by means of a charm supplied from some remote association of literature or of history. Mr. Lowell thus depreciates Milton, but we thus praise Mr. Lowell. The difference in favor of Milton is that his art subdues his imagination, while Mr. Lowell's fancy is quite too willful for his art. Milton's charm accordingly is always the handmaid of his purpose. But Mr. Lowell's purpose is often cheated by his charm. We happen to have an example immediately in hand. For, with admirable fitness, the sentence quoted above, while imitating in its own movement the numerous march and the scenic pomp of the Roman triumphal procession to which the richly storied progress of Milton's verse is finely compared, contains in the word "Sicambrians" a highly effective spell to the historic imagination that is quite in Milton's manner as well as in Mr. Lowell's own. But observe. The

mention of the German tribe, aptly suggested by Mr. Lowell's art, becomes suddenly too stimulating to Mr. Lowell's fancy, and he finishes his sentence with an offset to his praise of Milton, as unintended probably at first with the writer as it certainly is unexpected to the reader, but at any rate quite inartistically discordant with its previous tenor. It is very lively, no doubt, to speak of "broad shoulders" in connection with the Sicambrians, but to speak of "broad shoulders" as thrust between us and the thought in Milton's poetry, may be just or it may not to the merit of Milton's manner—it is in either case a violent change in the direction of the sentence which goes far to defeat its opening promise altogether. This is clearly a case in which nothing lacked to the production of a rhythmical period of wholly satisfactory prose but the patience and the continence of exercised art. Mr. Lowell is in fact almost everything that goes to the making up of a classic in literature—alas! almost everything but that which is the supreme thing after all—he refuses to be an artist.

Thus far of the sentence considered as style. A word or two now of the sentence considered as criticism. In the first place, Milton's epithets are not "captive" epithets. They are his own epithets as hardly any other poet's epithets are his own. If it had fallen in Mr. Lowell's way to speak thus concerning Gray instead of concerning Milton, he would have hit a truth in criticism, and have hit it very happily. Gray's epithets are indeed exactly captive epithets. They were not born into his dominion, that is to say—they are his, nevertheless, but they are his as spoil of war. For Gray throve as poet by a high style of literary freebootery, something like that recognized piracy which Thucydides says that anciently whole

nations of Greek islanders were proud to practice and to avow for their legitimate means of livelihood and wealth. He made honorable forays everywhere into all the poetic Indies of literature, and brought troops of epithets home with him, willingly led in a splendid captivity of which neither captive nor captor had reason to be ashamed. And Gray's poetry is to a wonderful degree dependent for its charm on these captured adjectives. His poetry might fairly be described, indeed, as an elaborate mosaic, inlaid and illuminated with other poets' gems and precious stones in a setting supplied by the artist himself, that almost always harmonizes and not seldom heightens their several lustres. These ornaments were culled by Gray with an exquisiteness of choice which really amounted to genius with him, and they were wrought together into their miraculous result with an endless patience of art that, in what it effected, was scarce worth distinguishing from original poetic inspiration.

Far otherwise is it with Milton. His epithets are not captives. They are as different from captives as possible. There is capture, to be sure, in the case, but it happens in entirely different relations. The epithets themselves are the captors. They make prisoner the picture or the history to which they relate, and bind it fast forever with the bond of a word—a charm of fitness that cannot be broken. More: they captivate the imagination of the reader so that he can in no wise thenceforward free himself from vassalage to the magical word. Abana and Pharpar flow for him through rich imaginative realms, always "*lucid* streams." It is "*vernal* delight" that the breath of spring inspires. A phrase endows us with a wealth, a phrase invests us with an empire, in the land of the sun, beyond the boast of Crœsus, beyond the fame of Alexander—"the

gorgeous East." "*Most musical, most melancholy,*" reconciles us never on this side of the Atlantic to hear the note of his nightingale outside of Milton's verse.

> "*Sabæan* odors from the *spicy* shore
> Of *Araby the blest*——"

with what an ineffable charm of history, of travel, of romance—with what a fixed embalmment of odorous spice and of "soft delicious" sound it chains us up in musing alabaster!

Mr. Lowell forgot himself that moment. He could not consciously have written "captive" of Milton's epithets. But we have probably refuted a meaning that Mr. Lowell never intended to convey. We have done him the unintentional injustice of trying to understand him too strictly. The style of the sentence, fine as it is, is fine, it will be observed, after a somewhat mixed and composite rhetorical order. The sentence sets off in language not designed to be figurative. Milton's manner is affirmed to be "slow," to be "stately." There were tropes, however, implicit in these descriptive words, and the delicate verbal tact in Mr. Lowell's pen was sure to feel them there. A simile is the result—"moving as in triumphal procession." No sooner is the simile begun than metaphor seems better to the writer's kindling fancy, and the sentence proceeds in language proper to the triumphal procession alone—"with music, with historic banners, with spoils from every time and every region"—except that the word "time" here belongs on the other hand only to the poetry. After this the metaphor is suddenly inverted, and the poetry alone is described, though in terms mixed of metaphor and simile—"and captive epithets, like huge Sicambrians, thrust their broad shoulders between us and the thought whose pomp they

decorate." The word "captive" seems thus merely to be an explanatory copula between the two terms of the metaphor inverted. In simple candor, therefore, we suppose that Mr. Lowell wrote the adjective with exactly no meaning whatever for it in its application here. He was merely intent on filling out his fine analogy between the Roman triumph and Milton's verse with one ostensible resemblance more. Critical felicity and, with that, style itself were sacrificed to gratify an importunate and irresistible fancy. In truth it is King Ahasuerus and Queen Esther between Mr. Lowell and his fancy almost everywhere throughout these volumes. The bewitching queen is always on her knees, and the uxorious king is always extending his sceptre. He never wearies of offering to give her the half of his kingdom, and she never blushes to accept the gift. The issue is inevitable—Mr. Lowell remains but a nominal sovereign in his own realm. He continues to reign, but he ceases to govern.

It was conscientiously, and not grudgingly or captiously, that we added the qualifying clause, "at least in his external characteristics," to our acknowledgment of Mr. Lowell's apparent capacity to appreciate Milton. A reservation seemed necessary. The tenor of the discussion in which the sentence quoted occurs, may well excite a doubt whether the high point of view that reduces the majestic astronomy of Milton's poetry and genius to their true Copernican order has ever been used by Mr. Lowell for a survey of the subject. Here, at any rate, he commits the grave critical mistake of forgetting to consider what is the essential, the differentiating characteristic of the species of poetry to which the "Paradise Lost" belongs. He judges epic poetry by the dramatic standard, disparaging Milton's imagination in comparison with Shakespeare's, because

Milton's imagination is epic and Shakespeare's dramatic.

There is in reality no common measure of Shakespeare and Milton. They are simply incommensurable magnitudes—hopelessly incommensurable. Milton is an epic poet and Shakespeare is a dramatic poet. Shakespeare is unquestionably the first of dramatic poets. But Milton no less unquestionably is the first of epic poets. That is the end of the comparison between them. Anything said further becomes discrimination and contrast of the drama and the epos. For the two are radically different, the radical difference between them being this—that dramatic poetry shows us history making, while epic poetry shows us history made. Dramatic poetry is written in the living present—the tense of progress and action. Epic poetry is written in the past tense—a kind of remote and absolute aorist. Dramatic poetry asks of us to let the stage fill for its moment the whole field of our view. We are invited to forget that we are not really inhabitants of the world which we see represented—not really contemporary with its growing events. We are to be the willing children of fancy. Epic poetry puts a telescope into our hands and invites us to survey what it reveals afar, without losing conscious sight meantime of objects near at hand visible to the natural eye. We are not desired to forget that we live in a different world from that which we behold—not desired for even an instant to suppose ourselves present at the birth, and witnesses of the growth, of the events described. We are to exercise the imagination rather than to indulge the fancy.

From this discrimination of dramatic and epic poetry, it follows of course that what is good in the one may be very bad in the other. For example, since dramatic

poetry aims to obliterate differences of date and of place between the action and the spectator, anything that tends to impair the vividness of present impression, that asks aid of the imagination and cannot get all it needs from the fancy, is hurtful to proper dramatic effect. On the contrary, it is of the very genius of epic poetry to interpose time and distance between the action and the reader, and consequently everything that tends to increase this separation, if properly managed, becomes helpful in the highest degree to the proper epic effect. The longer the vista, the more crowded the perspective —the grander the impression of what is seen at the end, if what is seen is but distinctly seen. Pre-eminently is this true of Milton's great poem. For Milton's action is put at the very beginning of time, or before it. All human history has since intervened. The recollection of this is never for a moment to be absent from the reader's mind. It communicates, therefore, the very highest epic grandeur to Milton's verse, when he throngs the intervening distances between us and his action with the figures and events of subsequent history. His "pitfalls of bookish associations" might be a fault,—however splendid a fault,—if he were a dramatic poet. They are no fault, but a consummate virtue, in him as an epic poet. A mindful and balanced criticism would have taken account of this.

We have thus bestowed what might seem a very disproportionate amount of attention upon a single illustrative specimen of style and of criticism. But we have acted with deliberate purpose, for with Mr. Lowell, as with most writers, the sentence is likely to be the microcosm of the essay. It is true at least in Mr. Lowell's case that the same capricious law of chance association is ready to cast its spell upon his fancy, to lead his constructive faculty astray, whether in the scheme of an

essay or in the mould of a sentence. A bright metaphor, a lucky allusion, a stroke of wit, is to Mr. Lowell what a butterfly, a squirrel, a brook, is to the schoolboy. It makes him forget his errand. He plays the truant. He finds plenty of wonderful and delightful things. But he wanders wide of his goal.

An instance of this occurs at the opening of "Shakespeare Once More." Mr. Lowell begins by doubting somewhat fancifully, though not very freshly, whether any language has resources enough to furnish a vehicle of expression to more than one truly great poet, and whether again any but a single very brief period in the development of the language admits the possibility of that unique phenomenon. He felicitates the race to which Shakespeare belongs on their good luck in the favorable condition of Shakespeare's appearance. He happens in doing so to speak of "that wonderful composite called English," and cannot help adding, wittily enough, though not to his purpose, the "best result of the confusion of tongues." But he allows this allusion to suggest the next sentence: "The English-speaking nations should build a monument to the misguided enthusiasts of the Plain of Shinar"! and he then concludes the introductory paragraph with a boast on behalf of our language, which, though not inapposite to his general design, prevents the immediate passage from producing a cumulative or even an harmonious impression. The extravagance, the confusion, the movement without progress, the distracted syntax, the whimsicalness, and withal the brilliancy and wit in manner, united to strict commonplaceness in matter, which appear in this opening paragraph, make it an admirable reduced model of the entire essay. For this reason it will repay a little examination in detail.

"It may be doubted whether any language be rich

enough to maintain more than one truly great poet." This whimsey, not first broached by Mr. Lowell, is so self-evidently absurd that it does not admit of any very satisfactory form of statement. The simplest form, perhaps, is the best. "Possibly no language can furnish means of expression to more than one truly great poet." The difficulty, however, with the statement in this plain form of it is, that it too sharply confutes itself. Clearly if a language can afford utterance to one truly great poet, it can to another, and to an indefinite number. A truly great poet's use of a language does not impoverish the language. It enriches it rather. But Mr. Lowell employs a more figurative form of statement. He suggests a doubt "whether any language be rich enough to maintain more than one truly great poet." As if the language were a gentleman of wealth, and kept poets as a part of his establishment. The real relation exists in a sense precisely inverted. It is the poet that maintains the language, and not the language that maintains the poet. Every preceding poet has made it easier, and not harder, for his successor to find adequate means of expression.

So much for the common sense of the matter, irrespective of actual history. But now for actual history —let it be in the case of the English language. Is not Milton a great poet? Mr. Lowell himself calls him so in his essay on "Pope." Or are we to make a distinction, and consider Milton a "great" poet, only not a "truly great" poet? But let us proceed with our sentence and see. After a comma and a dash, Mr. Lowell continues: "and whether there be more than one period, and that very short, * * * when such a phenomenon as a great poet is possible." Here the "great poet" completes its handy little orbit, and revolves promptly into view again, unaccompanied by

its casual satellite, the "truly"—and we give up our guessing. "And that very short" is a clause without any syntax but a syntax that would reverse Mr. Lowell's actual meaning.

The next sentence of the paragraph is: "It may be reckoned one of the rarest pieces of good-luck that ever fell to the share of a race, that (as was true of Shakespeare) its most rhythmic genius, its acutest intellect, its profoundest imagination, and its healthiest understanding should have been combined in one man, and that he should have arrived at the full development of his powers at the moment when the material in which he was to work—that wonderful composite called English, the best result of the confusion of tongues—was in its freshest perfection."

Here is characteristic syntax. It is a labyrinth in which Mr. Lowell lost his way. It is easy to mark the exact point where he dropped the clew with which he had entered. It is the word "race" at the close of the first clause. He began with the conception of any race whatever in his mind. From the point named, he continues as if he had specified the English race. In strictness, as the sentence stands, the pronoun "its"—"its most rhythmic genius, its acutest intellect," etc.—has no antecedent anywhere expressed, and none even implied until subsequently. Its ostensible antecedent is "a race." The real antecedent is a term that is not in the sentence at all, and that evidently was not in the writer's mind till he wrote the possessive pronoun "its;" the real antecedent is "the English race." The parenthesis, "as was true of Shakespeare," was probably inserted as an afterthought, to mediate a reconcilement between the discordant constructions. But it only serves to produce "confusion worse confounded." "Shakespeare" should be a "race" to justify the paren-

thesis, or to make the parenthesis justifying. If Mr. Lowell had said "as was true in the case of the English race," instead of saying "as was true of Shakespeare," he would not, to be sure, have rescued his grammar, but he would have come nearer to rescuing it. It was worth his while to remember so rudimentary a rule of composition as that the parenthesis is not a grammatical, but a rhetorical device. A sentence that will not parse without a parenthesis will not parse with one. The syntax as well as the main sense too of a passage is quite independent of words in parenthesis. Omit the words in this parenthesis, and read the sentence through. The confusion becomes apparent enough. Or omit all that intervenes between the beginning and the ending, and couple the extreme terms of the construction directly together. Thus: "It may be reckoned one of the rarest pieces of good-luck that ever fell to the share of a race [any race], that its best man should have appeared when the English language was in its freshest perfection." This is what Mr. Lowell says, though it is not the whole of what he says. It is just to add that all this abortive strain of expression is thrown away upon a thought or a course of thought that was ill worth the pains when it was new. It may be found, together with much besides that Mr. Lowell has honored with re-statement, in a repertory of Shakespearean commonplaces no more remote than Mr. Richard Grant White's "Essay on Shakespeare's Genius," in his excellent edition of Shakespeare's works. Mr. Lowell may have imported into his version some new degrees of vivacity. But he has also imported into it as many new degrees of extravagance.

This is not hypercriticism. Granted, that not one in ten ordinary readers would of himself observe the defects pointed out. Every reader of the ten would have

felt the unrecognized influence of the defects. Such incertitudes of expression betoken a confusion of thought in the writer which infallibly begets a reflex confusion of intelligence in the reader. One is bewildered as he reads, he hardly knows why. Mr. Lowell's lack of wide acceptance with the general reading public is a problem that has perplexed his admirers. Mr. Lowell himself seems not unwilling to bid for more popular recognition in the quasi-colloquial forms of metaphor and of phrase with which he frequently alloys the purity of his refined and scholarly English.[1] We venture the opinion that it is far more the want of firm and clear conception on his part securing for itself as of necessity its own properly consistent and pellucid expression — far more this, than it is any essentially esoteric quality in the substance of what he has to com-

[1] "He did not mean his great tragedies for scarecrows, as if the nailing of one hawk to the barn-door would prevent the next from coming down souse into the hen-yard." ("Among My Books," p. 224.)

A verse of Dryden "is worth a ship-load of the long-drawn treacle of modern self-compassion." ("Among My Books," p. 63.)

"It makes no odds, for you cannot tell one from tother." ("My Study Windows," p. 259.)

"The bother with Mr. Emerson is," etc. ("My Study Windows," p. 376.)

"Nothing is harder than to worry out a date from Herr Stahr's haystacks of praise and quotation." ("Among My Books," p. 300.)

A man's 'capacity of indignation' should exist as a "*latent* heat in the blood, which makes itself felt in character, a steady reserve for the brain, warming the ovum [why not 'egg?'] of thought to life, rather than cooking it by a too hasty enthusiasm in reaching the boiling point." ("My Study Windows," p. 62.)

Mr. Lowell, by the way, seems unusually fond of all sorts of culinary metaphors and images. We had thought of culling an anthology of specimens for our readers, but the result would perhaps be rather curious than instructive. Mr. Emerson's influence on Mr. Lowell is evident in many ways, but notably in these attempts of his to accommodate his diction to the homely popular usage.

municate, that keeps Mr. Lowell so steadily remote as he continues to be from the general appreciation. Apart, however, from his impatience of severe and self-tasking labor, first in thought and then in expression—apart, we say, from this, the trick of allusion, the indirection, the talking about and about, the commentator's habit, to comprise all in a word, as distinguished from the independent thinker's habit, which characterize Mr. Lowell's customary manner, unfit him for face to face encounter with the average reader. "*Le public se porte bien*," the French critic insisted as a justifying reason why the public should not trouble itself to enter into the morbid psychology of certain writers whose ill health imparted a peculiar and more ethereal quality to their production. The American reading public in general is full of affairs, and will stay to listen to no man that has not a straightforward message to deliver.

Mr. Lowell is no plagiarist. It cannot quite be pleaded in his behalf, to be sure, that he takes possession of his own wherever he finds it, in the exercise of that right of eminent domain in its material which belongs by universal prescription to the sovereignty of paramount genius. But when he borrows, as he frankly and freely does borrow, he always puts the broad arrow of his own individuality upon his appropriations, and they are fairly enough his own. He could reclaim them afterwards by his mark. Still, notwithstanding the vividness with which he re-invests familiar thoughts by virtue of the vividness with which he conceives them anew, the sense of his having been anticipated in them seems generally present to his own mind as a kind of unfriendly haunting demon. This undefined consciousness on his part of being a follower betrays itself to the reader in two quite different ways. Occasionally

Mr. Lowell will rouse himself on a sudden to the audacity of challenging a first proprietorship in some idea that long since passed into the common currency of literature. He says "I venture," or "it seems to me," to introduce a trite sentiment that at the moment probably does appear to him to be his own, because he has sincerely apprehended it afresh for himself. Far more frequently he labors as if under the spur of a feeling that he must at least supply new moulds of language, together with additional lights of interpretation and illustration and parallel allusion, to warrant his working so freely in material that has been furnished from alien mines. His sentence consequently will often, without explicitly stating its main thought at all, proceed on the apparent assumption that it is already in the reader's mind as well as in the writer's, and deliver itself up to running this main thought on into a strain of brilliant rhetorical amplification and picturesque comment. The result is a species of writing which is full of piquant surprises in suggestion that are part wit and part poetry, though in exceedingly variable qualities and proportions of the two, and which is very often rich in rhythmic verbal effects. But to adopt one of his own culinary metaphors, it is the whipped cream rather than the roast beef of literature. The Saxon literary stomach asks for food, and Mr. Lowell offers it a flavor.

We were at needless pains in a previous paragraph to vindicate the truth of common sense and of fact against the adopted vagary of Mr. Lowell about the necessary historic conditions of a great poet's appearance. Mr. Lowell himself elsewhere supplies the sufficient refutation of himself. His singular intemperance of statement is continually involving him in real or in apparent inconsistencies. Indeed, his want of self-restraint seems often to become its own retribution.

For it is very observable, that however extravagant he may at one moment indulge himself in being in a given direction, he is pretty certain, sooner or later, to be taken possession of by the avenging whim of being just about equally extravagant in nearly or quite the contrary direction. Thus the passage alluded to in "Shakespeare Once More," fantastically questioning the possibility of more than one great poet to a language, and intimating that that one great poet could appear only at the brief crisis of the "freshest perfection" of the language, finds its appropriate offset in the essay on Chaucer, where Mr. Lowell says: "It is true that no language is ever so far gone in consumption as to be beyond the great-poet-cure. Undoubtedly a man of genius can out of his own superabundant vitality compel life into the most decrepit vocabulary." ("My Study Windows," p. 240.) The admiring student of Mr. Lowell's teeming pages will find his careful comparative attention to these different statements rewarded with the discovery of the following interesting and probably unanticipated implications of critical truth:

First, a language must be in its "freshest perfection" to admit of the appearance of a great poet.

Secondly, a great poet may notwithstanding appear when a language is at the farthest possible remove from its "freshest perfection."

Thirdly, a great poet so exhausts any language, however rich, that it is no longer able to maintain another great poet.

Fourthly, a great poet, on the other hand, is happily capable alone of reviving and re-establishing any language, however impoverished.

While, fifthly, and singularly enough, the influence of a great poet recovers a moribund language so ex-

cessively, that the language is thenceforth too vigorous to endure the vitalizing virtue of another great poet.

There is said to be somewhere, if one knew how to reach it, a sublime ecliptical point of view from which all the apparent contradictions and confusions in human thought are restfully interpreted and reconciled to the speculation of the transcendentalist without his effort. Mr. Lowell manifestly lives in the sun, and is a natural astronomer. In his system of the universe of truth, everything is delightfully simple and easy. The sanguine prospect of the observer encounters no difficulties in any direction. A single pregnant discovery of critical law solves all problems and harmonizes all discords. The master principle, that one thing is as true as another in criticism, entitles, we think, its discoverer to be acknowledged the Kepler of the critical sphere, as we take great pleasure in proceeding still further to show.

We are, then, to present some additional illustration of that artificial enthusiasm of momentary sympathy to which his sense of necessity disposes Mr. Lowell, and by which he is often betrayed into broaching quite irreconcilably contrary critical opinions. We attribute this fault of inconsistency in him to an extravagance on his part of present sympathy in some particular direction—and yet at times Mr. Lowell appears rather to us almost, as it were, pure faculty of intelligence joined to pure capacity of expression apart from any power of judgment, either to embarrass or to guide. We exaggerate, of course, the defect, though scarcely the merit, in choosing our statement. His mind is an incomparable instrument of apprehension for all possible forms of human thought. Nothing is so high, nothing so large, nothing so deep, nothing so strange, nothing so subtle, nothing so near, and nothing so far, but once propose it to that "keen seraphic flame" of intelligence, and it

will instantly yield its ultimate secret up to the importunate and imperious quest. His gift of language, too, is adequate to all the hard demands for expression that thus arise. Given a sense, or the shade of a sense, a flavor, or the suspicion of a flavor in his author, and Mr. Lowell will not only seize it for you in an instant. In the same instant he will improvise a form of words for it that shall possess every degree of felicity except that last degree, the grace not of nature but of art, which, in a charming paradox, that would seem to have been, though it probably was not,[1] itself an illustration, long ago received the name of "curious felicity"—we English transfer rather than translate the happy Latin phrase, *curiosa felicitas*—"careful good-luck." If, therefore, our search were solely for an intellect to apprehend, commanding language to express, every conception that could possibly be submitted to its operation, there would be little left to desire beyond the qualifications that meet in Mr. Lowell. In fact the mere delight of understanding and of putting into speech too often seems to satisfy his aspiration. There is no insatiable need incorporated into his mental constitution to seek a ground of unity or of harmony for his various impressions. It is enough for him that he has the present impression, and that he is able to give it a suitable language. To adjust it with another previous impression is no part of his concern. Let both take their chance together. There is no paramount claim. Neither owns any right that can exclude the other. As there was no seizin, there can be no disseizin.

[1] We say 'probably was not'—for the phrase is attributed to Petronius Arbiter (Beau Brummel to Nero), who used it in speaking of Horace. Petronius was still more a dissolute man of fashion than he was an accomplished man of letters—whence little likely to have bestowed much curious pains upon his work.

The second comer is as good as the first—and no better.

If we compare the closing paragraph of the essay on Shakespeare with a sentence or two occurring incidentally in the course of an essay on "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists," we shall meet with a very good illustration. Mr. Lowell's title, "Shakespeare Once More," implies his own sense of the difficulty of attracting public literary attention by saying anything new on so hackneyed a theme, and the whole essay seems to betray that uneasy effort to overtop predecessors in far-sought hyperbole of adulation, which such a consciousness was likely to beget in a mind not disposed to break in any degree with the prevalent best-bred traditions of criticism on the subject. Accordingly the entire paper has too much the air of seeking its reason of existence in assuming what has already anywhere been said in eulogy of the lucky dramatist, and advancing upon it a degree or two farther in the direction of the conventional extravagance. Having therefore exhausted the resources of his intense and brilliant rhetoric in praising the genius of Shakespeare, what had the critic left for crowning his climax but to set the character of Shakespeare still higher than his genius? It seems that Shakespeare is not only the greatest genius, but the most admirable character, in human history! And this is the style in which the thing is done:—

"But higher even than the genius we rate the character of this unique man, and the grand impersonality of what he wrote. What has he told us of himself? In our self-exploiting nineteenth century, with its melancholy liver-complaint, how serene and high he seems! If he had sorrows, he has made them the woof of everlasting consolation to his kind; and if, as poets are

wont to whine, the outward world was cold to him, its biting air did but trace itself in loveliest frost-work of fancy on the many windows of that self-centred and cheerful soul." ("Among My Books," p. 227.)

Before analyzing this paragraph to determine the quality of what it contains in itself, let us set by the side of it a few sentences which we find in the essay entitled "Rousseau and the Sentimentalists:"—

"There is nothing so true, so sincere, so downright and forthright, as genius. It is always truer than the man himself is, greater than he. If Shakespeare the man had been as marvellous a creature as the genius that wrote his plays, that genius so comprehensive in its intelligence, so wise even in its play, that its clowns are moralists and philosophers, so penetrative that a single one of its phrases reveals to us the secret of our own character, would his contemporaries have left us so wholly without record of him as they have done, distinguishing him in no wise from his fellow-players?" ("Among My Books," p. 359.)

The collation of these two passages offers to the pleased student of truth the following important results:

On the one hand, in the same individual the genius is always greater than the character.

On the other hand, the character is sometimes greater than the genius in the same individual.

In Shakespeare notably the genius was greater than the character.

But, in turn, the character was greater than the genius in Shakespeare.

If now it could also appear that perhaps, in addition to being sometimes both mutually superior and mutually inferior to each other, genius and character were likewise never either superior or inferior to each other,

but were, on the contrary, always exactly equal, or, better still, essentially identical, the satisfaction of the inquiring and ingenuous mind would be complete. Nothing is to be despaired of to the reader of Mr. Lowell. We shuffle the pages and we have: "Nay, may we not say that great character is as rare a thing as great genius, if it be not even a nobler form of it?" ("Among My Books," p. 298.) All the stimulating antinomies necessary to constitute a many-sided, in fact, a completely spherical criticism are realized here.

In close connection with the sentence just cited from the essay on Lessing we find this: "Since Luther, Germany has given birth to no such intellectual athlete [as Lessing]—to no son so German to the core. [The anti-climax is a favorite figure of Mr. Lowell's.] Greater poets she has had, but no greater writer." Poets and writers are not generally understood to be antithetical classes. What Mr. Lowell means by the discrimination we have honestly studied to find out, but in vain. Whether he means that take Lessing's poetry, indifferent as it is, and his prose together, they make him a greater author than any other German poet or prose writer, greater even than Goethe (*posthabita Samo*); or whether he means that Lessing, though surpassed in poetry, has never been surpassed in prose by any German; or whether he means that, considering Lessing the man along with Lessing the author, we must rank him as Germany's greatest—whether one of these three things, or some fourth thing, far wiser, that we have not had the luck to hit upon at all, Mr. Lowell himself would have to be invoked to decide. He ends the passage by acknowledging Goethe to be "rightfully preëminent," and then putting Lessing above him, both in the same sentence. On the whole, Mr. Lowell in this instance has chosen not to offer us Lessing's famous

hypothetical alternative. His right hand, with the truth of his meaning in it, he keeps back. But in his left hand he certainly holds out to us the most liberal opportunity of eternally seeking the truth.

It were an idle inquiry which one of the two somewhat inconsistent judgments of Shakespeare above quoted is Mr. Lowell's more intimate conviction. The one incidentally suggested by way of illustration in the course of a discussion not directly related to Shakespeare is perhaps more likely to reflect Mr. Lowell's habitual thought, and it has, beyond that, the advantage of common sense on its side. But attentive reading of nearly the entire body of criticism comprised in these volumes strongly tends to persuade us that both the judgments of Shakespeare which we have thus brought together for mutual acquaintance from quarters so widely separated, were neither more nor less, in their several places, than mere rhetorical expedients. They were improvised for different occasions. It was but natural that they should differ from each other.

It was not necessary to bring together sentences from separate essays in order to illustrate Mr. Lowell's cheerful independence of himself. Within the brief compass of the essay on Pope these various expressions occur—harmonize them who can: "In Pope's next poem, the 'Essay on Criticism,' the wit and poet become apparent." ("My Study Windows," pp. 409–410.) "I come now to what in itself would be enough to have immortalized him as a poet, the 'Rape of the Lock,' in which, indeed, he appears more purely as poet than in any other of his productions." (*Ib.*, p. 410.) "I think he has here touched exactly the point of Pope's merit, and, in doing so, tacitly excludes him from the position of poet, in the highest sense." (*Ib.*, p. 423–4.) "However great his merit in expression, I

think it impossible that a true poet could have written such a satire as the Dunciad." (*Ib.*, p. 425.) "Even in the 'Rape of the Lock,' the fancy is that of a wit rather than of a poet." (*Ib.*, p. 425.) "The abiding presence of fancy in his best work [the 'Rape of the Lock'] forbids his exclusion from the rank of poet." (*Ib.*, p. 432.) "Where Pope, as in the 'Rape of the Lock,' found a subject exactly level with his genius, he was able to make what, taken for all in all, is the most perfect poem in the language." (*Ib.*, p. 432.)[1] These citations we have given in the order in which they occur in the text with the exception of the last two, which we could not resist the temptation to transpose for the sake of securing, as we thought, a little happier climax.

But let us return to look again at the paragraph with which Mr. Lowell concludes the most important, and in many respects the best, of his essays. Mr. Lowell says that he honors the character still more than he honors the genius of Shakespeare. "Higher even than the genius we rate the character of this unique man," are his words. Thus far the sentence is simple and the sense is easy to the understanding, however hard it may be to the judgment. But after a manner of Mr. Lowell's he adds an unexpected clause. The purpose apparently is to make the sense easier to the judgment. The principal effect, however, is to make the sense harder to the understanding. The whole sentence is: "Higher even than the genius we rate the character of this unique man, and the grand impersonality of what he wrote." As if suddenly conscious, with that swift,

[1] "Thet is, I mean, it seems to me so,
But, ef the public think I'm wrong,
I wunt deny but wut I be so."
—"The Biglow Papers."

not seldom too swift, synthesis of thought for which Mr. Lowell is justly remarkable, as if thus suddenly conscious of the bald absurdity involved in such an avowal of preference with respect to a man of whose personal history we know little, and of whose personal history his wisest admirers would wish we knew less, Mr. Lowell attaches a kind of rider to his principal clause, in the words "and the grand impersonality of what he wrote," by way of an interpretative enfeeblement of the meaning, as willing so to reduce it within rational bounds. Mr. Lowell, then, unable to ground his preference of Shakespeare's character to Shakespeare's genius on knowledge, grounds it on ignorance, of the man. Shakespeare the man is more admirable than Shakespeare the genius, because Shakespeare the genius is impersonal in his work! But Shakespeare was far from impersonal certainly in his sonnets—poems full of a luscious sweetness in passages, and with hints here and there of the Shakespearean insight, but of a prevailing quality such that the gentle-spoken and judicious Hallam is well warranted in his regret that they ever were written. Mr. Lowell, therefore, must refer to the impersonal quality of Shakespeare in his dramas. But the inexorable condition of success in dramatic composition is that the writer shall forego the pleasure of obtruding his own personality in his work. To be willing to forego this pleasure is one thing—to be able to forego it is another. To be willing to forego it may be manly. That perhaps is a matter of character. To be able to forego it is a higher achievement. But that is a matter of genius. To use a homely figure, emboldened by the plentiful example of Mr. Lowell himself, we may say that the sentence has neatly, like a cat, caught its tail in its mouth. For, saying that Shakespeare's character is more wonderful than his genius,

because his genius is impersonal in its work, is only saying that Shakespeare's genius is more wonderful than his genius. A lame and impotent conclusion, to be sure, but worthier than to have let the unqualified absurdity of the first declaration stand.

The few sentences that follow the one on which we have now particularly remarked at the close of the essay on Shakespeare, are characterized by a peculiarity of Mr. Lowell's manner which often offends in him against purity and homogeneity of tone. We quote again: "What has he told us of himself? In our self-exploiting nineteenth century, *with its melancholy liver-complaint*, how serene and high he seems! If he had sorrows, he has made them the woof of everlasting consolation to his kind; and if, as poets are wont to *whine*, the outward world was cold to him, its biting air did but trace itself in loveliest frost-work of fancy on the many windows of that self-centred and cheerful soul." We do not think that poets are wont to "whine" that the outward world was cold to Shakespeare. Nor do we think that the world was cold to Shakespeare, or is, or is ever likely to be, to him, or to any of his kind. Shakespeare is of the world, and the world always loves its own. Nor again, to take Mr. Lowell now as he means, and no longer as he says, can it be truly charged against "poets" that they "are wont to whine" of the world as cold to them? Here and there a poet "whines," no doubt, often with good reason, too, of the world's coldness to his claims. But more poets, against good reason, refrain from whining. "Whining" is not characteristic of their class.[1] Whatever

[1] Mr. Lowell repeatedly accuses his age of "liver-complaint." In "Among My Books," p. 332, he says sentimentalism ["melodious whining"] began with Rousseau. In the same volume, p. 366, he says it began with Petrarch—several centuries earlier.

may be the truth as to this, it is a disagreeable, a peevish, a morbid note interjected here to speak of the century's "melancholy liver-complaint," and of the poets' "whine." Such discords in tone are very frequent everywhere with Mr. Lowell. They have a singularly disenchanting effect on the reader. They make him ask himself, Does this cracked voice, this frequent sudden falsetto, betray the critic's natural expression, and is the manful heartiness and wholesomeness, are the sound chest-tones, with which he generally aims to speak, the artificial instrument which nature, overmastering habit, ever and anon makes him forget to use?

How purely false and sentimental the suggestion is about Shakespeare's exposure to the neglect of the world, is understood at once on recalling the fact that he retired to Stratford, in his still unbroken prime, accompanied by the general good-will, to enjoy an income reasonably computed to have been equivalent to ten thousand dollars (present value) a year. And as to the admirableness of his temper under such very tolerable poet's adversity, Mr. Richard Grant White sorrowfully testifies that Shakespeare's chief latter wish seemed to be to rank as a considerable landed proprietor in his native shire, and that the records show his serene highness to have been repeatedly engaged in the extremely human occupation of suing delinquent debtors to recover sums nominated in his bonds!

But Mr. Lowell loves to say whatever admits of being said, and he has been willing to compromise his challenge for Shakespeare of complete impersonality in his dramas, so far as to suggest the ingenious and interesting conjecture that Prospero perhaps was consciously intended to represent the dramatist himself.[1] There

[1] "Prospero (the very Shakespeare himself, as it were, of the tempest)." Coleridge (Works, Am. ed., vol. iv., p. 75).

is at least a plausible illustrative fitness in the suggestion. No character of all that miniature mankind which inhabits the microcosmic page of Shakespeare so happily answers to our conception of Shakespeare himself as the gracious and gentle wizard Prospero. The wisest loyalty to Shakespeare's fame will not seek to enthrone him too high. Tennyson's lines seat him high enough:

> For there was Milton like a seraph strong,
> Beside him Shakespeare bland and mild.

It is much if Shakespeare be admitted to smooth his placid brow in neighborhood to the severe and serene, the seraphic aspect of Milton. More it were mere fatuity to ask.

Mr. Lowell is perhaps at his strongest as critic when he is characterizing single qualities of his author, and when he is indulging in those minor appreciations of particular passages and phrases or charm-like words which he loves to intersperse throughout his more general discussions. His sentiment and his fancy are exquisitely susceptible to verbal spells, and he is seldom or never at fault in divining just where the true secret of a poetic incantation lies. He thus speaks of Milton's "fulmined over Greece" as "Virgilian" in its Latinized phrase, and as conveying "at once the idea of flash and [of] reverberation," while avoiding "that of riving and shattering." He contrasts with this the Shakespearean "oak-cleaving thunderbolts" and "the all-dreaded thunder-stone" as differently fine in equally effective adherence to the native Saxon idiom. "What home-bred English," he aptly asks, however, "could ape the high Roman fashion of such togated words as

> The multitudinous sea[s] incarnadine,

where the huddling epithet implies the tempest-tossed soul of the speaker, and at the same time pictures the wallowing waste of ocean more vividly than the famous phrase of Æschylus does its rippling sunshine?" The "*more* vividly" here is in accordance with Mr. Lowell's tendency to overstatement. The "innumerable laughter" of Æschylus is Attic, and "the multitudinous seas incarnadine" is a kind of British Romanesque, but the Greek and the English, as far as we can see, are equally vivid for their several purposes. It is hard for Mr. Lowell to secure harmony—his single felicities are instinctive. "Milton's parsimony (so rare in him) [in whom else, pray, than Milton, should 'Milton's parsimony' be rare? But how again, if parsimony be rare in Milton, is there properly any such quality as 'Milton's parsimony' to be spoken of at all?] makes the success of his

> 'Sky lowered, and, muttering thunder, some sad drops
> Wept at completion[1] of the mortal sin.'"

("Among My Books," p. 185.) Here the particular appreciation is just and fine, but the generalized depreciation is hasty and unsustained. Can the author of

> Rose like an exhalation

to describe the noiseless, swift, and buoyant spring of that aërial architecture under fallen-angelic hands—of

> Seems another morn
> Risen on mid-noon,

to describe the sudden illumination of Raphael's descent to Adam and Eve in Eden—of

> Led her blushing like the morn,[2]

[1] "Completing," instead of "completion," is Milton's word—chosen for nice reason.

[2] With the incandescent purity of this unfallen similitude of

to describe the auroral flush of color that suffused the maiden Eve as Adam for the first time took her hand —of

> Rose, as in dance, the stately trees,

to describe the solemn and choral alacrity with which the just-created trees sprang to their station and their stature, at the fiat of the Omnific Word—of

> What seemed his head
> The likeness of a kingly crown had on,

to describe the spectral brow, that wore the spectral crown, of Death—the apparition of a crown on the apparition of a brow—of

> Far off his coming shone,

to describe the advancing state of Filial Deity bent against the rebel angels—of

> Eternal wrath
> Burnt after them to the bottomless pit,

to describe the pauseless, measureless, ruinous rout of the apostate host fleeing into the abyss—can the author of these and of many other such creative phrases of the great imagination be wisely characterized as not knowing how to be effectively frugal in words? But

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Milton's, to which it would not be unfit to apply the language of his own resplendent line—

> Of radiant Urim, work divinely wrought—

Mr. Richard Grant White, with such felicity, compares the following equivocal leer in Shakespeare—

> A pudency so rosy, the sweet view on't
> Might well have warmed old Saturn—

to the advantage of Shakespeare, of course—because Shakespeare's verses have no "*like*" in them!

Mr. Lowell, according to his wont, was exclusively occupied with devotion to a single author. He had no use for Milton here but to make him a foil for his Shakespeare.

A curious parallel might be cited that superficially would prove the exact opposite of Mr. Lowell's dictum as to Shakespeare's and Milton's comparative parsimony with words in the production of their effects. Shakespeare has:

> As sweet, and musical,
> As bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair.

Milton has:

> As musical as is Apollo's lute.

Milton's line is from one of his youthful pieces, the "Comus," and if he followed Shakespeare's in it, as is unlikely, the copyist's natural temptation to justify himself by drawing out his original in additions, only makes the self-restraint manifested more noteworthy. It would look at first sight as if Milton were here, in a crucial case, proved the more frugal of the two. The wanton overgrowth, if there is any in either, is certainly Shakespeare's rather than Milton's. But we should fall into Mr. Lowell's own mistake of precipitate judgment to affirm a characteristic difference between the two poets on so slight a foundation. The truth rather is, that Milton was discoursing of divine philosophy and an Attic taste happened here best to become him. Shakespeare's different purpose permitted the fanciful excesses of his verse, and with help to his more composite effect. And in general the fact seems to be that both Shakespeare (at least when he is pure dramatist and not proper poet at all) and Milton are indifferently ready to be now concentrated and now

diffuse, as the particular occasion requires. If Shakespeare wishes to flash a sudden effect upon us, like a gleam of lightning which reveals a whole world in an instant, he makes King Lear invoke the aged elements in that sublime, that most pathetic adjuration—though even here the luxurious habits of Shakespeare's less disciplined genius tempt him to be lavish after he had shown himself capable of munificent parsimony.[1] If he describes Cleopatra's barge or the Field of the Cloth of Gold, he does as Milton does in describing Hell and in describing Paradise—he overwhelms us with profusion. Mr. Lowell is primarily a poet, next he is a rhetorician, pure critic is he last of all, or not at all. He criticises very well as long as he remains a poet. When he becomes a rhetorician, his criticism is often a series of misleading freaks.

It seems strange, by the way, to note a word wrong or a word out of place in poetical citations made by a taste so nice as Mr. Lowell's, and, shall we add, by a criticism so very exigent in its demands of exactness from others. That Goldsmith's

> Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow,

should appear

> Remote, unfriend*ly*,

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[1] We are perfectly conscious that our instance from Shakespeare makes rather against than for our concession to him of the quality in question. The fact is, that Shakespeare's *dramatic* imagination often enough produces its effect with few words; but his *poetic* imagination, call it fancy rather, had a quite irresistible tendency to "native" profusion. We have tried in vain to recall a good example in Shakespeare of a distinctively poetic effect, on a grand scale, produced as are so many of Milton's, by a stroke of language. So wholly wrong seems Mr. Lowell to us to have been in his discrimination of Shakespeare and Milton on this point.

in Mr. Lowell's text ("Among My Books," p. 37), may be attributed to negligent revision of the press, or even to intentional change (though the change seems not required by the purpose), the better to humor a pleasantry of the critic's. But Wordsworth's beamy verse,

> The light that never was, on sea or land,

becomes

> The light that never was on land or sea,

on Mr. Lowell's page ("My Study Windows," p. 388), as if taken carelessly at second-hand from current misquotation.[1] Did Mr. Lowell mean to offer us a silent emendation in quoting ("Among My Books," p. 161)

> The multitudinous *sea* incarnadine

for

> The multitudinous *seas* incarnadine?

Mr. Lowell very frankly furnishes us the means of tracing the pedigree of that unhappy compound adjective of his in "The Cathedral," *down-shod*, when he invites our admiration to Dryden's heavy-buoyant, tramping-tripping

> And all ye hours,
> That danced away with down upon your feet.

He can afford to be frank, for he has certainly packed Dryden's conceit in the very smallest possible compass, and it is a case in which verbal parsimony is cogently recommended by the slight value of the idea to be expressed. A sentiment recurs several times in Mr. Lowell's prose, which he has also induced to sing modestly in very neat verse — verse good enough, in

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[1] We notice that Mr. Whittier quoting this line makes the same mistake, in his charming introduction to "John Woolman's Journal."

fact, to be let alone for ultimate on the subject, and so to stand for illustration of itself—

> Though old the thought and oft exprest,
> 'Tis his at last who says it best.

This is the theory on which Mr. Lowell appears to have written his essays. Success would have been its own sufficient justification. Adequate effort would have condoned a failure. To have failed without the effort made, betrays a conception on the author's part of the conditions under which a vital literature is produced that falls, we think, very far below the pitch of their true gravity and severity.

But we reproach ourselves. We feel that we have as yet done scant justice to the prolific critical results that flow from Mr. Lowell's emancipated literary methods. This new criticism prepares literally no end of exhilarating shocks for its trustful disciples. Take a fresh example: "The quality in him [Shakespeare] which makes him at once so thoroughly English and so thoroughly cosmopolitan is that aëration of the understanding by the imagination which he has in common with all the greater poets, and which is the privilege of genius." ("Among My Books," p. 182.) We easily forgive the inelegance of the duplicated relative constructions here when we consider how much the critic had to express, and what strength of elastic mutual repugnancy among its components he was obliged to overcome in order to embrace them all harmoniously within the bounds of a single sentence. Note:—To have the understanding leavened with imagination is English [!], is thoroughly English; it is universal, thoroughly universal; next, in the wide distribution of this English trait to everybody in the world, Shakespeare even, and with him all the greater poets, have not been overlooked;

while finally, genius possesses it in a kind of monopoly. What, we ask, could be more inspiriting to the youthful mind than to be whirled about for a season in the vortices of a sentence like that? What—unless it be to find out after the excitement is over that Mr. Lowell has contrived it all, without any real paradox in thought, by mere legerdemain of style? For Mr. Lowell's meaning is apparently this: That Shakespeare's solidity of understanding kept him thoroughly national as an Englishman, while his gift of imagination, qualifying that, put him in effective sympathy with all men of every race; —that this temperament belongs to great poets generally, and is indeed the prerogative of genius. A very sensible view, which it required some ingenuity to present so as to produce the authentic lively and refreshing effect of paradox.

Again: "He [Shakespeare] was an English poet in a sense that is true of no other." ("Among My Books," p. 226.) "Dryden, the most English of our poets." (*Ib.*, p. 42.)

Once more: "If I may trust my own judgment, it ['the Roman genius'] produced but one original poet, and that was Horace." ("My Study Windows," pp. 238, 239.) "The invocation of Venus, as the genetic force of nature, by Lucretius, seems to me the one sunburst of purely poetic inspiration which the Latin language can show." (*Ib.*, p. 239.)

Of Burns, Mr. Lowell says that he has been wronged by that "want of true appreciation, which deals in panegyric, and would put asunder those two things which God has joined,—the poet and the man." ("Among My Books," p. 291.) Having thus once for all declared the genius and the man indissolubly married, he divorces them (and it happens by a very fine felicity to be in allusion to Burns again) after this fashion:

"With genius itself we never find any fault. * * * We care for nothing outside the poem itself. * * * Whatever he was or did, somehow or other God let him be worthy to write *this*, and that is enough for us. We forgive everything to the genius; we are inexorable to the man." ("Among My Books," p. 356.)

"Character,—the only soil in which real mental power can root itself and find sustenance." ("Among My Books," p. 318.) "Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns,—what have their biographies to do with us? Genius is not a question of character." ("Among My Books," pp. 356, 357.)

Mr. Lowell's talent for fairness (give him room to "orb about") is, we half suspect, something more than talent. It has at least one of the characteristics which he himself attributes to genius. It is exceedingly "forthright." And sometimes we even think it is "greater than he;" for we find it now and then snatching a grace of comprehensive impartiality a little beyond, we are sure, the reach of the critic's conscious art. The analysis and harmony of the following passages will supply several instances:

"[We] will venture to assert that it is only poets of the second class that find successful imitators. And the reason seems to us a very plain one. The genius of the great poet seeks repose in the expression of itself, and finds it at last in style, which is the establishment of a perfect mutual understanding between the worker and his material. The secondary intellect, on the other hand, seeks for excitement in expression, and stimulates itself into mannerism, which is the wilful obtrusion of self, as style is its unconscious abnegation." * * * "I know that Milton's manner is very grand. * * But it is manner, nevertheless, as is proved by

the ease with which it is parodied," etc. ("Among My Books," pp. 181, 184.)

"Language, I suspect, is more apt to be reformed by the charm of some master of it, like Milton, than by any amount of precept. The influence of second-rate writers for evil is at best ephemeral, for true style, the joint result of culture and natural aptitude, is always in fashion, as fine manners always are, in whatever clothes." ("My Study Windows," pp. 401, 402.)

"The dainty trick of Tennyson cloys when caught by a whole generation of versifiers, as the *style* [italics Mr. Lowell's] of a great poet never can be." ("My Study Windows," p. 211.)

The first of the foregoing citations makes broad the distinction between "manner" and "style," and affirms that "manner" is the brand of second-class genius, while "style" is the attribute exclusively of first-class genius. It ascribes "manner" to Milton, accounting thus for the fact alleged of his being imitable, and inferring thence his second-class rank:—

The second of the citations contrasts the ephemeral influence exerted on letters for evil by the mannerisms of second-rate writers, with the perennial influence exerted on letters for good by the "true style" of a master of language like Milton:—

The third of the citations pronounces it a universal law that "*style*," pertaining only to first-class genius, is beyond the reach of imitation.

It thus appears that

First, if Mr. Lowell has in one place roundly refused to Milton the attribute of "style," that circumstance in his opinion is no reason why he should not, in another place, handsomely concede to Milton the attribute of "style;"

Secondly, if Mr. Lowell has in one place formally

demonstrated that Milton was a second-class writer, he is not therefore the less ready in another place, with great and unconscious liberality, to imply that he was not a second-class writer; and,

Thirdly, if Mr. Lowell has seen it necessary to affirm in one place that Milton's lack of "style," as distinguished from "manner," exposed him to imitation, he would consider it mere critical bigotry not to acknowledge in another place the equally important complementary fact that Milton's possession of "style," as distinguished from "manner," rendered him for ever incapable of being imitated.

It may possibly be that within the compass of these volumes an instance could be found where either the positive or the negative pole of expressed opinion on a critical point has been left unsupported by the presence somewhere else in them of the just counterpoising repulsion of its diametrical opposite. But in face of criticism so unconsciously provident as this, we should not like to assert it.

One experiences several successive 'degrees,' as the medical men say, of effect from the influence of Mr. Lowell's company when he is exercising his office of critic. The first degree is a certain bewilderment. Follows a rallying surprise and shock. Then for a while one feels his spirits constantly rising. One could take critical excursions forever with Mr. Lowell. There is such a delightful sense of escape. The attraction of gravitation is abolished, and we are careering away at large on the wings of the wind in the boundless country of the unconditioned. In fact, we are going up in a balloon. It is glorious. But we grow a little light-headed. We remember Gambetta. Gambetta went up in a balloon. One would not like to resemble Gambetta. Our elation gives way. We pray for a

return to the domain of law. We sigh like Ganymede, like Europa, for the solid ground. The Pegasean gait that seems proper for the poet becomes extremely discomposing at last in the critic. If the journey is to be a critical one (no pun is intended, though the temptation is great, and Mr. Lowell's example is very contagious) we choose the peaceful paces of the steady-going palfrey that keeps to mother earth rather than the ample bounds in air of a "courser of immortal strain."

What has already been given may suffice for a *conspectus* of Mr. Lowell's critical discrepancies. We are ready now for a little further attention to the style independently of the criticism.

The most characteristic and most essĕntial happens also to be the most salient quality of Mr. Lowell's style. It is a *wit* that is as omnipresent and as tireless as electricity itself. He himself says in English of Carlyle what, as has elsewhere been pointed out by another, had already been said in French of Michelet, that he saw history by flashes of lightning. It would be equally true to say of Mr. Lowell that he reads literature by flashes of wit. The effect is quite indescribable. A quivering, phosphorescent sheen plays everywhere over the pages, and sets them in a tremulous illumination that never permits the attention of the reader to sleep. To give any adequate idea by example of the pervasive influence on his prose of this quality of Mr. Lowell's, we should be obliged to quote the entire contents of the volumes. We are sure that no other equal amount of literature could be produced that would yield to a competent assay a larger net result of pure wit. Generally the spirit of the wit is humane and gracious. Often, even in cases where it appears to be otherwise, the acerbity is so manifestly assumed for the sake of the wit that we easily forgive

the illusion of pain inflicted to the reality of the pleasure conferred. But here, as in some other points, Mr. Lowell sins by too much. He has humored his wit till his wit has become too wayward for him. The servant and the master exchange places. Mr. Lowell's exaggerated sense of the ludicrous cheats him into the indulgence of the extravagant and grotesque. The "aërating" principle predominates in his temperament. And yet when we encounter in him the levity that results from vivacity unrestrained, we remain still at a loss whether to blame or to excuse. On the one hand, his gifts and his accomplishments, perhaps we ought to add the pretensions implied in his work, incline us to hold him to a strict accountability. But, on the other, we doubt if his opportunities have been favorable. It is true enough that brilliant table-talk and the wit that wins the easy applause of wondering undergraduates are a material that needs to be selected from with very wasteful heed before it can be wrought into a durable literature. But how, suppose one is worked so hard in an every-day vocation that the bright improvisations which have been forced out of an overtaxed mental vitality by the commonplace occasions of the dinner-table and the class-room, are the best or the only response that he has it in his power to make to the demand on him for books? We do not affirm that the genesis of Mr. Lowell's essays is such as we have suggested. That would be presumptuous, for we know nothing about the matter. But it is a perfectly sincere overture of extenuation on Mr. Lowell's behalf to have made the suggestion. And we insist that the texture of much of the composition agrees well with our hypothesis. It is extemporization. The sallies of wit are frequently, if they are not prevailingly, of just that sort which a very ready-minded and very

full-minded man might make, stimulated in a helpful atmosphere of sympathetic social appreciation on the convivial occasion, or from the professor's chair. They are lively, but they are too lively. The criticism likewise and the discussion have that unconsidered and desultory quality which, while very misbecoming to serious composition, is a fault readily excused in the extemporary lecture, and is a positive charm in conversation. The construction of the sentences is indeed often very elaborate, but elaborate in such a way as almost tempts one to think that all were written under some whimsical resolution never once to change the mould of expression in which the crude thought sought first to be cast.

The really remarkable incoherences and inconsistencies that characterize Mr. Lowell's prose, considered as an individual body of literature, are most naturally accounted for when we suppose that his essays grew under his hands sentence on sentence and paragraph on paragraph, as chance opportunity served, by a process of distinct accretions separated from each other by irregular intervals of time, without the patience afterward bestowed to fuse all into unity in the costly welding glow of one long-continued imaginative heat. Criticisms produced as these have been, at different epochs in the history of a living and growing mind, might naturally contain some few expressions of opinion not wholly congruous with one another. The just reason why Mr. Lowell is liable now to critical censure on account of his incongruous expressions is threefold: in the first place, they often occur in one and the same essay; in the second place, they are too serious and too numerous, as found in different essays; and, in the third place, the essays should, at all events, have been made to harmonize when they were finally collected into

volumes. Was the leisure lacking to him for such editorial revision of his work? Then it would have profited to remember that a single one of these essays severely finished,—as a patience on Mr. Lowell's part equal to his genius might surely have finished at least one of them,—would constitute a better guaranty to him of his individual fame than all of them together do in their actnal state. It would, too, be incalculably a more useful genetic and regulative force in literature. Mr. Higginson has learned from Emerson a wiser lesson than Mr. Lowell.

As already suggested, we should despair of making any fair impression of Mr. Lowell's wit by specimen quotations. But here is a good stroke, sudden, light, and, rarest of all qualities in Mr. Lowell's wit, momentary as an electric spark. He is speaking of Lessing's play, "Nathan": "As a play, it has not the interest of Minna or Emilia, though the Germans, who have a praiseworthy national stoicism where one of their great writers is concerned, find in seeing it represented a grave satisfaction, like that of subscribing to a monument." ("Among My Books," p. 345.)

Again, in the essay on "Witchcraft," he is describing the circumstances under which a man who had sold himself to the Devil was taken away by the purchasing party "as per contract." "The clothes and wig of the involuntary aeronaut were, in the handsomest manner, left upon the bed, as not included in the bill of sale." ("Among My Books," p. 98.)

Once again, what could be more delicious than this? Mr. Lowell relates one of his experiences in relieving mendicants: "For seven years I helped maintain one heroic man on an imaginary journey to Portland,—as fine an example as I have ever known of hopeless loyalty to an ideal." ("My Study Windows," p. 58.)

One has here, it is true, to blink the element of personal weakness on Mr. Lowell's own part, revealed in the incident, supposed real, or the element of extravagance and improbability in it, supposed imaginary.

We give a few specimens of the faults in wit which we blame in Mr. Lowell. He is speaking of the sixteenth century as prodigal in its production of great men. "An *attack* of immortality in a *family* might have been looked for then as *scarlet-fever* would be now," he says. ("Among My Books," p. 163.) "Shakespeare himself has left us a pregnant satire on dogmatical and categorical æsthetics (which commonly in discussion soon lose their ceremonious *tails* and are reduced to the internecine *dog* and *cat* of their bald first syllables)"! (*Ibid.*, p. 195.) "It is comparatively easy for an author to *get up* [italics Mr. Lowell's] any period with tolerable minuteness in externals, but readers and audiences find more difficulty in *getting them* [whom? or what?] *down*, though oblivion *swallows* scores of them at a *gulp*." (*Ibid.*, p. 208.) Does the following parenthesis pleasantly let slip something besides a pun? Is it a true word spoken in jest? "I might suspect his thermometer (as indeed I did, for we Harvard men are apt to think ill of any *graduation* but our own)." ("My Study Windows," p. 4.) Speaking of a certain literary vogue, Mr. Lowell says "the rapid and almost simultaneous [simultaneous with what?] diffusion of this purely *cutaneous eruption*." ("My Study Windows," p. 391.) "For my own part, though I have been forced to *hold my nose* in picking my way through these *ordures* of Dryden." ("Among My Books," p. 49.) Speaking of the Transcendental movement of thirty years ago, Mr. Lowell says, "No brain but had its private maggot, which must have found pitiably short commons sometimes." ("My Study Win-

dows," p. 194.) We smile at the sudden witty turn in the last clause, though we immediately perceive that its wit is rather apparent than real, since of course if *every* brain had its maggot, some maggots must necessarily have found short commons. The smart *mot*, in fact, only says that some human brains are poor. "Most[1] descriptive poets seem to think that a *hogshead* of water *caught at the spout* will give us a livelier notion of a thunder-shower than the sullen muttering of the first big drops upon the roof." ("Among My Books," p. 185.) (Was he thinking of Byron's magnificent "like the first of a thunder-shower"?) "For such purposes of mere æsthetic nourishment Goethe always *milked* other minds,—if minds those ruminators and digesters of antiquity into *asses' milk* may be called." ("Among My Books," p. 188)—a half-page being devoted to an absurd but witty and laughable carrying out of the fantasy, until metaphor fairly becomes allegory. Mr. Lowell says "the average German professor spends his life in making lanterns fit to guide us through the obscurest passages of all the *ologies* and *ysics*, and there are none [that is, we suppose, no *other*] in the world of such honest workmanship. They are durable, they have intensifying glasses, reflectors of the most scientific make, capital sockets in which to set a light, and a handsome lump of potentially illuminating tallow is thrown in. But in order to *see* by them, the explorer must make his own candle, supply his own cohesive wick of common-sense, and light it himself." ("Among

[1] Here again Mr. Lowell's too lavish generosity to his immediate subject becomes unconsidered injustice to the subject in contrast. Does not a different law properly govern the descriptive poet from that which governs the dramatic? A descriptive poet's *business* is description. Might such a poet not be permitted without blame to use "water" somewhat freely in describing a thunder-storm?

My Books," p. 293.) And on the same page, with exquisitely unconscious irony upon himself, Mr. Lowell says, "Delightful as Jean Paul's humor is, how much more so [that is, how much more 'delightful as it is'] it would be, if he only knew when to stop!" We simply need to add, "and when not to begin," to make the conditions suit Mr. Lowell's case completely.

So much surpassing beauty is marred by so much infesting defect in Mr. Lowell's prose style that the appreciative reader is kept constantly at his wit's end whether to be more provoked at the carelessness or more delighted with the genius. Here is a sentence which, for its imaginative quality, might have been written by Sir Thomas Browne. The expression is nearly perfect. It is not statuesque. It is something better. It blooms, and it breathes, and it moves like the Apollo Belvedere: "A new world was thus opened to intellectual adventure at the very time when the keel of Columbus had [just] turned the first daring furrow of discovery in that unmeasured ocean which still girt the known earth with a beckoning horizon of hope and conjecture, which was still fed by rivers that flowed down out of primeval silences, and which still washed the shores of Dreamland." ("Among My Books," p. 154.) Why did not Mr. Lowell take the trouble to notice that no "*very*" time was pointed out unless he said "when the keel of Columbus had '*just*,'" etc.?

The following fine simile for Shakespeare's cosmopolitan quality has a crystal clearness and a massy calm in its expression which make it like the summit of Mont Blanc itself: "Among the most alien races he is as solidly at home as a mountain seen from different sides by many lands, itself superbly solitary, yet the companion of all thoughts and domesticated in all imaginations." ("Among My Books," p. 184.)

What a gracious gleam of beauty—like a glimpse of lovely June ("Then, if ever, come perfect days")—the words we italicize in the following sentence impart to a context that is otherwise so perplexedly constructed: "Praise art as we will, that which the artist did not mean to put into his work, but which found itself there by some generous process of Nature of which he was as unaware as *the blue river is of its rhyme with the blue sky*, has somewhat in it that snatches us into sympathy with higher things than those which come by plot and observation." ("Among My Books," p. 224.)

There is a singularly delicate appreciation conveyed in singularly delicate language in this about style: "That exquisite something called Style, which, like the grace of perfect breeding, everywhere pervasive and nowhere emphatic, makes itself felt by the skill with which it effaces itself, and masters us at last with a sense of indefinable completeness." ("Among My Books," p. 175.) The adhering fault (slight, to be sure) in it is, that when we come to the word "masters," we are left uncertain whether that is connected by the preceding "and," to the "effaces itself," or to the whole clause commencing "makes itself." Will it be too close criticism if we ask, also, Does "everywhere pervasive" exactly express the idea intended? To be "everywhere pervasive" is "to possess at every point the capacity of pervading." But, instead of that, "to possess the capacity of going to every point" is, we suppose, what Mr. Lowell meant.

Here is a fine insight well communicated to the reader. He is speaking of the letters that passed between Lessing and his betrothed:

"They show that self-possession which can alone ['alone can' (?)] reserve to love the power of new self-surrender,—of never cloying, because never wholly pos-

sessed." ("Among My Books," p. 329.) If we fill the ellipsis before "of never cloying," the grace of perfect expression will seem to be wanting. Thus: "They show that self-possession which alone can reserve to love the power [?] of never cloying because never wholly possessed ['imparted' (?)]" Attentive analysis will recognize here that trick of almost hopeless self-contortion in the coils of expression to which Mr. Lowell's thought seems to us to be addicted beyond that of any writer of credit and of worth that we know in literature.

If the blemishes thus detected disfiguring the finish of sentences that are otherwise so near to an ideal perfection, were exceptional to the general style of the writer, it would be pure hypercritical paltriness to have pointed them out. But we have sincerely selected the very choicest specimens that we found of Mr. Lowell's literary art—perhaps we should be truer to his deliberate preference in theory as well as to our own conception of the fact that exists, if we said, the very choicest specimen of Mr. Lowell's literary luck. The prevailing habit of his style is more slovenly by far than these specimens would indicate.

In fact the disarray of Mr. Lowell's literary manner is so striking, as, in our opinion, seriously to affect the decorum of his public appearances in print. We have often, since commencing these criticisms, been prompted to imagine how many degrees of dignity, and even of grace, due attention on his part to the punctilios of grammatical etiquette would have added to the impression which he makes on his reader. A "noble negligence" is sometimes no doubt the trait of a noble art. It was a "noble negligence" when Milton wrote his "fit audience find though *few*." One is not so sure, but it was perhaps a "noble negligence" when Shake-

speare wrote his "take *arms* against a *sea* of troubles." But in the former at least of these instances the art is as conspicuous as the negligence. Mr. Lowell's carelessness impresses us differently. It appears to be in great part a deliberately humored characteristic of his manner. A truly "noble negligence" is not an affectation. But even as an artifice, Mr. Lowell's negligence lacks the relief of contrast with a general carefulness to make it fortunately effective. For in still greater part it is, if we mistake not, a habit of mere slackness and indolence.

Gentlemen of birth and fortune in aristocratical societies are fond of employing an order of attendants to stand in the relation of what we, in our democratical inaptitude, may be excused for conceiving of as a kind of personal groom to their masters. These valets take pride in presenting their employers creditably to the social public in the character of animated lay figures that shall attest their own professional proficiency in the fine art of dressing. Now why, pray, might not the customs of literature permit authors of the higher class to be similarly served in those last attentions to literary toilette, which are at the same time so tedious and so necessary? There must, one would say, in the natural economy of literature, be at least as many accomplished men of culture as gifted men of genius. What more fit and more fruitful intellectual alliance could be fancied than one which should bring the two classes together in well-mated pairs? A man of culture —*ad unguem factus homo*—a sort of Admirable Crichton—if he were also a man of sense, should esteem it a privilege to fulfil the office of literary valet to an agreeable man of genius. The idea is of course a whimsical one; but we offer a few exemplifications of the kind of work which no doubt Mr. Lowell himself would gladly

have expended upon his style if he could only have done it by the hand of another. The opening sentence of the essay on Thoreau is this:

"*What* contemporary [of whom?], if he was in the fighting period of his life [when?], (since Nature sets limits about her conscription for spiritual fields, as the state does in physical warfare,) [shall this parenthesis stand?], will ever forget *what* was some*what* vaguely called the 'Transcendental Movement' of thirty years ago? ['that intellectual movement of thirty years ago which was somewhat vaguely called the 'Transcendental Movement' (?)]" How would this do?—"Who is there of us all, old enough, and not too old, to have been in the fighting period of his intellectual life when it occurred, that will ever forget the 'Transcendental Movement,' somewhat vaguely so called, of thirty years ago?"

In the very next sentence of the essay, the participle "set" is without any proper construction. Grammatically, its subject is of course the subject of the sentence, viz., "impulse." "Impulse," however, "sets astirring," is not "set astirring." The writer's evident purpose was to apply his participle to "movement." The sentence should therefore read as indicated in the brackets to follow: "Apparently set astirring by Carlyle's essays on the 'Signs of the Times,' and on 'History,' the final and more immediate impulse was given by ['it received its final and more immediate impulse from'] 'Sartor Resartus.'" This exemplifies a very frequent grammatical looseness of Mr. Lowell's. Instances might be multiplied to an indefinite number.

What shall we say of such a sentence as this? "While I believe that our language had two periods of culmination in poetic beauty,—one of nature, simplicity, and truth, in the ballads, which deal only with narrative

and feeling,—another of Art, (or Nature as it is ideally reproduced through the imagination,) of stately amplitude, of passionate intensity and elevation, in Spenser and the greater dramatists,—and that Shakespeare made use of the latter ['make use' of a 'period'?] as he found *it* ['found' the 'period'?], I by no means intend to say that he did not enrich it ['enrich' a 'period'?], or that any inferior man could have dipped the same words out of the great poet's inkstand." ("Among My Books," p. 165.) Mr. Lowell's *caveat* is expressed with unnecessary circumspection. An "inferior" man certainly cannot write so well as his superior. But no *caveat* whatever of the sort was called for here. It would be impossible for a reader of Mr. Lowell to suspect that his author "intended" to intimate anything derogatory to Shakespeare, or to omit anything that could add to Shakespeare's praise.

Again: "So soon *as* ['as soon as' (?)] a language has *become* literary, so soon *as* there is a gap between the speech of books and that of life, the language *becomes*, so far *as* poetry is concerned, almost *as* dead *as* Latin, and (*as* in writing Latin verses) a mind in itself essentially original *becomes* in the use of such a medium of utterance unconsciously reminiscential and reflective, lunar and not solar, in expression and even in thought." ("Among My Books," p. 155.)

Mr. Lowell gives us a neat statement of the "scope of the higher drama": "The scope of the higher drama is to represent life, not *every-day* life, it is true, but life lifted above the plane of bread-and-butter associations, by nobler reaches of language, by the influence at once inspiring and modulating of verse, by an intenser play of passion condensing that misty mixture of feeling and reflection which makes the ordinary atmosphere of existence into flashes of thought and phrase whose brief,

but terrible, illumination prints the outworn landscape of *every-day* upon our brains, with its little motives and mean results, in lines of tell-tale fire." ("Among My Books," p. 222.) Portable and handy—all in a single sentence—and for luminosity, too, like a bit of phosphorus.

For illustration of the manner in which the centrifugal prevails over the centripetal force in Mr. Lowell's mental constitution, take the following. He begins by alluding, as any ordinary critic might, to the state of the text of Shakespeare, but he speedily finds a tangential component, as no ordinary critic would, that sets him off freely into space: "However this may be"—that is, whether or not Shakespeare had "come at last to the belief that genius and its works were as phantasmagoric as the rest, and that fame was as idle as the rumor of the pit"—"however this may be, his works have come down to us in a condition of manifest and admitted corruption in some portions, while in others there is an obscurity which may be attributed either to an idiosyncratic use of words and condensation of phrase, to a depth of intuition for a proper coalescence with which ordinary language is inadequate, to a concentration of passion in a focus that consumes the lighter links which bind together the clauses of a sentence or of a process of reasoning in common parlance, or to a sense of music which mingles music and meaning without essentially confounding them." ("Among My Books," pp. 172, 173.) That is, Shakespeare's obscurities are to be ascribed to any transcendental and impossible cause, no matter what, provided only they somehow be admitted to glorify him more and more! Coleridge's Shakespearean infatuation recommended itself to critical mercy, if not to critical respect, by the evident sense of discovery and revelation which inspired it. The

secondary affection, as exhibited in Coleridge's followers, it is less easy to regard with sufficient complaisance.

Here is an unequal yoking together of predicates, worthy of some transcendental justification: "The submission ['submissiveness' (?)] with which the greater number surrender their natural likings for the acquired taste ['to acquire the taste' (?)] of what for the moment is called the World is a highly curious phenomenon, *and*, however destructive of originality, is the main safeguard of society, and nurse of civility"! ("My Study Windows," p. 394.) One blushes, as, under his breath, he adjures himself to say, if there *is* any ground for his suspecting that Mr. Lowell as an author may have secretly resolved with himself upon the experiment of boldly writing down whatever happens into his mind at the time that he writes, and never blotting afterwards (Shakespeare, they say, never did), just for the sake of seeing whether one man may not turn out to be at least half as good as another after all.

"*Which*" to be parsed in this sentence: "The prologues, and those parts *which* internal evidence justifies us in taking them to have been written after the thread of plan to string them on was conceived ['conceive' a 'thread of plan' ?] are in every way more mature," etc. ("My Study Windows," p. 232.)

"Seldom wont." If you are "wont" to do a thing, you are "wont" to do it—and there is an end of the matter. A habit that exists, exists. That is to say, it is a habit. A habit cannot be said itself to exist either often or seldom, although it may, to be sure, be a habit of repeating a certain action more or less frequently. "Seldom wont" is, therefore, an irreducible solecism.

"Whatever other good things Herr Stahr may have

learned from Lessing, terseness and clearness are not among them." ("Among My Books," p. 304.) That is, if Herr Stahr learned some good things from Lessing, aside from "terseness and clearness," he did not learn "terseness and clearness" aside from "terseness and clearness." Probably not.

"Here, better than anywhere [' else' (?)], we may cite," etc. ("Among My Books," p. 323.)

"But though we feel it to be our duty to say so much of Herr Stahr's positive faults and negative short-comings, *yet we leave him in very good humor.*" ("Among my Books," p. 304.) We have the same feeling of duty with respect to Mr. Lowell that he himself expresses with respect to Herr Stahr. We shall certainly try to earn a right to the same cheerful confidence of leaving him in a kindly humor toward his critic, when we have done. *Mutatis mutandis*, and taking Mr. Lowell as he means, his generous sentiment will respectfully be our own.

"His mother was in no wise *superior*, but his father," etc. ("Among My Books," p. 307.)

"A young man of more than questionable morals, *and* who," etc. ("Among My Books," p. 308.)

Here is a "fine distraction" of pronouns: "The good old pastor is remembered now *only* as the father of a son who would have shared the benign oblivion of *his own* theological works, if *he* could *only* have had *his* wise way with *him*." ("Among My Books," p. 314.)

"The then condition." (*Ibid.*, p. 314.)

"Lifelong he was," etc. (*Ibid.*, p. 323), *et alibi.*

"Besides *whatever* other reasons Lessing may have *had* for leaving Berlin, we fancy that his having exhausted *whatever* means it *had* of helping his spiritual growth was the chief." ("Among My Books," p. 324.) There were other reasons for Lessing's leaving Berlin

than his having exhausted its opportunities, but "besides" those other reasons that was the "chief"!

"Clever, womanly, discreet, with just enough coyness of the will to be charming when it is joined with sweetness and good sense, she was the true helpmate of such a man." ("Among My Books," p. 329.) The "to be charming" here belongs properly to the subject of the sentence, as if it were written, "with just enough coyness of the will to be thereby rendered charming, when it is joined with sweetness and good sense"—which sufficiently betrays the inconsequent character of the syntax. If now, contrary to grammatical propriety, we give the "to be charming" to the "just enough coyness of the will"—as if it were written "with just so much coyness of the will as is charming when it is joined with sweetness and good sense,"—we have more defensible syntax for the clauses connected by "when," but it is then left unpredicated that the woman spoken of possessed the "sweetness and good sense"—nothing, except a certain amount of "coyness of the will," being predicated of her. The sentence is a fine study in what the grammarians call the *constructio prægnans*. The contorted syntax here, as in the introductory paragraph of "Shakespeare Once More," results from the apparently unconscious attempt of the writer to blend a general with a specific statement in one impossible sentence. The same attempt, with the same result, occurs in this sentence: "Lessing's life, if it is a noble example, so far as it concerned himself alone, is also a warning when another is to be asked to share it." ("Among My Books," p. 317.)

"This was not the last time that he was to have experience of the fact that the critic's pen, *the more it* has of truth's celestial temper, the more it is apt to reverse the miracle of the archangel's spear, and to

bring out whatever is toadlike in the nature of him it touches." ("Among My Books," p. 322.) Ithuriel, by the way, according to Milton, was not an archangel, but a spirit of subordinate rank.

A literary academy, such as that for which Mr. Matthew Arnold pathetically sighs in his England, would probably find the "note of provinciality" in extravagances like the following. Mr. Lowell is speaking his "Good Word for Winter:" "Charles II., who never said a foolish thing, gave the English climate the highest praise when he said that it allowed you more hours out of doors than any other, and I think our winter may fairly make the same boast as compared with the rest of the year." ("My Study Windows," p. 47.) Charles II. was a witty man, they say, as monarchs go. He may never have said anything else that was foolish (though even in the absence of the instance before us we should still have been forced to admire rather than believe when told that he quite absolutely 'never' did say a foolish thing—witty men are not apt to be so self-controlled), but it was surely a foolish thing that he said, if he said it, of the English climate. Mr. Lowell has, however, we think, fairly matched his royal original in saying what he does of the American winter.

What one influence (let our readers guess) wrought more powerfully than all other influences combined, to inspire the young heroes of our civil war? But our readers will never guess. It was Mr. Emerson. Mr. Lowell says: "To him more than to all other causes together did the young martyrs of our civil war owe the sustaining strength of thoughtful heroism that is so touching in every record of their lives." ("My Study Windows," p. 382.) The author of such a statement as that involuntarily betrays therein how narrow and pro-

vincial is the audience to which, by the instinct of habit, he unconsciously appeals. Perhaps one young martyr in fifty of our civil war had heard of Mr. Emerson; one in five hundred may have read his books; one in five thousand possibly was braced by them, directly or indirectly, to "suffer and be strong." Mr. Emerson's influence is no doubt sometimes intensively very great. The reach of his influence, extensively, it is easy to overrate.

We might fairly have added to our heads of indictment against Mr. Lowell's style a trick of repetition, the natural result of his want of the analytic faculty. In almost all of these essays the reader is bewildered by recurrences of the same thought, often in the same language, until he despairs of his progress toward any goal. He learns sooner or later that movement, and not progress, is his author's aim. The essay on Emerson is one pure gyration, almost from beginning to end. We shall not deny that a nice artistic fitness of treatment to subject might be pleaded in justification of Mr. Lowell here.

"Velleity" (a favorite use), "perdurable," "aliened," "dis-saturate," "oppugnancy," "deboshed" (for 'debauched'), "speechifying," "cold-waterish," "tother," "bother," "grub" (for 'food'), "souse," "bread-and-butter," "liver-complaint," "avant-couriered," "link-boy," "stews" (in a bad sense now rare), "huckster-wench," "blabbed," "primitive-forest-cure," "otherwise-mindedness," "all-out-of-doors," (a literary) "rag-and-bone-picker," "what-d'ye-call-'ems," "biggest-river-and-tallest-mountain" (recipe for an American poet), "to-do" (for 'ado'), "touchy," "transmogrify" and "crankiness," are specimens of such words and uses as, we think, tend greatly to deform the aspect of Mr. Lowell's pages. Moreover, his pages bristle with foreign words

and phrases that seem to cry *procul, procul* to the general reader.

We rest, as the lawyers say. In doing so, we may be permitted, however, to suffer Mr. Lowell's own example to justify us, as to himself, in the minuteness to which we have descended in some few of our strictures. We cite, for this purpose, several consecutive criticisms which Mr. Lowell makes in his essay on Pope. It will, we think, in view of these, be agreed that, however microscopic at times has been our attention to Mr. Lowell's style, we have not dealt to him in this respect a measure of complimentary fidelity beyond that which he himself had been before us in dealing to others. Of the comparative justness of the fidelity in the two cases, we of course leave to the reader to judge. Quoting the familiar opening of Pope's "Essay on Man," Mr. Lowell says: "To expatiate *o'er* a mighty maze is rather loose writing." ("My Study Windows," p. 417.) Pope's lines are:

> Expatiate free o'er all this scene of man;
> A mighty maze! but not without a plan.

Mr. Lowell, it will thus be seen, goes to the trouble of linking the preposition 'o'er' with its remote and appositive, instead of with its near and immediate object, for the sake of finding 'loose' syntax in Pope. But, even thus, is the charge sustained? A 'maze' is best studied from a point overlooking it. And since the invitation is to 'expatiate' figuratively over a figurative 'maze,' why not suppose that the excursion is on wing instead of on foot? The writing will not then appear to be very 'loose.'

Again, in immediate connection Mr. Lowell discovers (of all things in the world for Mr. Lowell) a logical fault in Pope's well-known passage commencing—

> Heaven from all creatures hides the book of Fate.

The stricture is too long to quote at this late stage in our criticism. We refer our readers to the volume. But it well displays that curious scholastic propensity in Mr. Lowell's mind to over-refinement which, being served rather by a faculty of wit than by a faculty of logic in its possessor, exposes him to mistakes at times in his serious writing almost as painful as, on the other hand, the lively turns to which it inclines him in his humorous, are amusing. Mr. Lowell, if we understand him, thinks it illogical for Pope to suppose that a lamb endowed with human reason would be able to foresee its own future any better than the same lamb is able to do without human reason. Most readers, we suspect, will decide that it is not Pope's logic that limps.

Mr. Lowell proceeds: "There is also inaccuracy as well as inelegance in saying,

> 'Heaven,
> *Who* sees with equal eye, as God of all,
> A hero perish or a sparrow fall.'

To the last verse Warburton, desirous of reconciling his author with Scripture, appends a note referring to Matthew x. 29: 'Are not two sparrows sold for one farthing? and one of them shall not fall to the ground without your Father.' It would not have been safe to have referred ['to refer'?] to the thirty-first verse: 'Fear ye not therefore, *ye are of more value* than many sparrows.'" ("My Study Windows," p. 418.)

Did anybody ever, we wonder, before Mr. Lowell, seriously take Pope to mean by his phrase, 'with equal eye,' that Divine Providence put the same value on a sparrow as on a hero? It seems to us unnecessary even to revert to the Latin idiom in which Pope probably used the word 'equal' here, in order to understand him as simply meaning that Providence neglects

neither the hero nor the sparrow, but regards them both with just discrimination. Precisely what inaccuracy, or what inelegance, Mr. Lowell designed to point out in italicizing the relative '*Who*,' is to us profoundly mysterious. It is certainly a very frequent usage of writers, perhaps especially of the deistic writers with whom Pope associated, to write 'Heaven' by metonymy for 'God.' The substituted word then receives the relative 'who' as of course. If 'that' had been employed, 'that' would replace 'who,' and not 'which.' 'Who' is every way preferable. But 'which,' in any case, is here inadmissible. We may be stultifying ourselves, however. For we admit that we cannot guess what good reason Mr. Lowell had for implying a mistake in Pope's 'who' here. The *ad hominem* argument, at least, of justification for the minute attention which, in the interest of good literature, we have paid to Mr. Lowell's faults of style will now, we presume, appear to be sufficient.

But we do injustice alike to Mr. Lowell and to ourselves when we thus apply the *argumentum ad hominem* to a case like his. The author's own chivalrous spirit, manifested everywhere throughout his work, can but itself be constantly felt by the appreciative critic as a friendly spur to frank, no less than to respectful, treatment of his subject. And we must claim to have written besides on the prompting of a vital first principle in what may be called the hygiene of literature. Mr. Lowell himself has given the principle a form of expression. The form of expression which he has given it may be liable to criticism, but the principle itself is one that cannot be gainsaid. "Without earnest convictions," is his language, "no great or sound literature is conceivable." ("Among My Books," p. 7.) We believe this profoundly, and we have long been in

the habit, with the jealous instincts of an ardent intellectual patriotism, of applying it to the state of our own national literature. With vivid æsthetic convictions of our own, that we do not affect to dissemble, we seek, by the proffer of a criticism sincerely intended to be loyal alike to the general and to the individual interests involved, to contribute our proportion, however small, toward rescuing American literature from the atrophy that threatens it as a result of the growing slackness of such convictions on the part of our authors, and of the consequent far too easy admiration exchanged among them of each other's productions.

But æsthetic convictions alone, however vivid and however just, entertained by the authors that produce it, are yet far off from being sufficient to continue the life of a literature. In truth, the soundest æsthetic convictions, we believe, possess small vigor for even surviving, themselves, apart from the vivific contact and virtue of supreme moral convictions. The health, the bloom, the splendor of Greek letters, in their long and beautiful youth, is no instance of deviation from the rule. The poets, both epic and tragic, the historians, the philosophers, the orators, of Greece—those masters among them, we mean, whose works remain the æsthetic despair of after-coming literary artists in every race and every age—were perhaps without an exception exemplars, not indeed of a Christian morality, but still of whatever was purest and best in the Greek moral and religious aspiration. Attic taste, whether in art or in literature, was kept to its exquisite tone, through all its undegenerate prime, by the severities of Attic morals and the solemnities of Attic religion.

We, of course, understand that Mr. Lowell himself attributed to the moral element as much literary im-

portance as this, when he declared that earnest convictions were an indispensable condition of a great, or even of a sound, literature. There is, after all, and Mr. Lowell knows it, no other such inspiration yet found, to any generous human purpose under the sun, as high moral conviction. Of this inspiration Mr. Lowell seems to us to have been born to be the subject. His earlier poetry is full to its bound, sometimes (in "The Present Crisis," for example) almost to overflowing its bound, with the ample breath of it. His later poetry, more capacious to have received the inspiration, is somehow differently inspired. And his prose, while containing, it must gratefully be acknowledged, little obvious implication of which the moral censor can justly complain, is still generally too vacant of that noble afflatus of tense moral conviction which we cannot help feeling was in a high degree natural to his genius, and which alone was able to make the fruit of his genius either great or enduring. Some sinister influence wrought to render that genius no longer continent of the grand inspiration of which it was fitted by nature to be so capacious. Perhaps he listened too long to that great son of Circe, the literary sorcerer, Goethe. We will not say that Goethe has prevailed to change him from the godlike image in which he was created. The upright, sky-fronting moral man that God made Mr. Lowell has not fallen prone, confounded with the grovelling herd of modern idolaters of art that graze and ruminate about their smiling German Comus. It is far from being so abject as this. But remote approach to the degenerate shape—the suggestion even of malignant transformation, we note in a man like Mr. Lowell with exquisite pain. It is true that he mingles an honest moral revolt with his yielded æsthetic adhesion. But we wish that the moral re-

volt had quite prevented the æsthetic adhesion. The cordial drop of disgust hardly saves the fulsome sea of adulation in a passage like the following: "Goethe's poetic sense was the Minotaur to which he sacrificed everything. To make a study, he would soil the maiden petals of a woman's soul; to get the delicious sensation of a reflex sorrow, he would wring a heart. *All that saves his egoism from being hateful is, that, with its immense reaches, it cheats the sense into a feeling of something like sublimity.*" ("Among My Books," p. 318.) So close on the instinctive moral disdain follows the half-ashamed, over-persuaded, idolatrous æsthetic submission. It seems strange that Mr. Lowell should not have imputed a vitiation to the principles of taste themselves that found their root in such a monstrous morality as Goethe's. And he was just on the point too of writing that tonic sentiment of his, "character—the only soil in which real mental power can root itself and find sustenance." The sentiment was suggested to Mr. Lowell in speaking of Lessing. It was the original and native New England element in the American critic that recognized and saluted the manliness of his German author. But it was the subsequent, transfused, Goethean element in him that induced his strain of ill-befitting raillery at the elder Lessings' pious concern over their son in his youth—a concern nevertheless which plainly enough indicates how that son's character, so lauded by Mr. Lowell, was born and was bred. For our own part, we feel it as a kind of cruelty to be forced to read, in the pages of a man who was but nobly true to his truer self when he said that earnest convictions were necessary to the greatness and the soundness of literature, such a sentence as this: "In estimating Shakespeare, it should never be forgotten, that, like Goethe, he was

essentially observer and artist, and *incapable of partisanship*." ("Among My Books," p. 152.) We italicize the last three words, that their true implication may not escape the reader. They mean that Shakespeare, in Mr. Lowell's opinion, was incapable of taking sides between virtue and vice. This is not said of Shakespeare as if it were a ghastly defect in his character. It is rather said as entirely homogeneous with the unmixed and unqualified eulogy of Shakespeare, which is the motive and material of the essay. On the next page Mr. Lowell holds this language: * * * "the equilibrium of his judgment, essential to him as an artist, but equally removed from propagandism, whether as enthusiast or logician, would have unfitted him for the pulpit." That is, Shakespeare's judgment was so perfect that he had no 'earnest convictions!' That is, the rights of good and the rights of evil in the world are so nicely balanced that equilibrium of judgment, when it becomes Shakespearean, can find no difference in favor of the one or of the other! That is, it was some defect of 'judgment' that made Jesus a 'propagandist' of virtue! That is, Paul could never have been the apostle that he was, if he had been equal to Shakespeare in 'judgment!' And such superhuman, with no hyperbole we may say, such supradivine, 'equilibrium of judgment' in Shakespeare, 'essential to him as an artist,' is no bar to Mr. Lowell's rating the character above the genius of the man that possessed it!

We have not the heart to insist here upon the prodigious inconsistency between the above-quoted expressions of Mr. Lowell and that nobler sentiment of his respecting the necessity to good literature of earnest convictions. We are too much occupied with indignant literary chagrin and shame, that a man, native to

everything severe and high in moral inspiration to intellectual achievement, should have been so enchanted out of his birthright by the evil charm of the charmer. We speak, in speaking thus, not on behalf of morals, but on behalf of literature. It is indeed the fact that inconsistencies and self-contradictions like those which abound in Mr. Lowell's work are probably traceable at last to some defective reverence in the author for the sacred rights of truth. Still it is not to be said that Mr. Lowell is immoral, or that he teaches immorality, in his writings. But he escapes being immoral, and he escapes teaching immorality, in his writings, if the paradox will be allowed, by the happy insincerity with which he holds and applies his own adopted canons of taste. By a fine revenge of the violated truth he does not however thus escape vital harm to the artistic value of his literary work from the infection of false principles in literary art. Nor does he—we must be so far true to ourselves—nor does he, we think, escape exerting such an influence in favor of the Goethean principles of æsthetics as is sure, however remotely, to have also its sequel of moral bale to those younger writers among his countrymen, who look to him as to their master. Alas, alas, say we, that no literary Luther was found betimes, to grapple the beautiful and climbing, yet leaning, spirit of the youthful Lowell as a literary Melancthon, strongly and safely to himself. How much might there not then have been saved to American literature—how much not to a fair, but half-defeated, personal fame! In default of an original and independent endowment of impelling and steadying force in himself, such as a high conscious and determinate moral purpose would have supplied, the friendly attraction of some dominant intellect and conscience near, different from Emerson's, and better suited to Mr.

Lowell's individual needs, seems the one thing wanting to have reduced the graceful eccentricities of his movement to an orderly orbit, and to have set him permanently in a sphere of his own, exalted, if not the most exalted, among the stars of the "clear upper sky."

Not prose, however, but verse, is Mr. Lowell's true literary vernacular. He writes, as Milton wrote, with his left hand, in writing prose. But whether in prose or in verse, it is still almost solely by genius and acquirement quite apart from the long labor of art, and of course, therefore, apart from the exercised strength and skill of that discipline to art, which is the wages of long labor alone, that he produces his final results. He thus chooses his place in the Valhalla of letters among the many "inheritors of unfulfilled renown." It seems likely at least (but he is yet in his just mellowing prime, and Apollo avert the omen!) that his name is destined to be treasured in the history of American literature chiefly as a gracious tradition of personal character universally dear, of culture only second to the genius which it adorned, of fame constantly greater than the achievements to which it appealed.

MR. BRYANT'S POETRY.

IT is now,[1] we believe, about the space of a generation since the American public first learned to associate the name of William Cullen Bryant with the "Evening Post" newspaper. During this unusually protracted term of editorial service, Mr. Bryant has taken frequent recesses from the exhausting demands of his profession. The intervals of leisure thus intercalated in a life otherwise laboriously occupied he has employed variously—in the main, however, dividing them between travel and foreign residence. More lately a country-seat on Long Island, beautiful by nature and beautiful by art, has drawn him with the lure of leisure and letters.

But within the year past, the newspapers tell us, Mr. Bryant has once more returned to do task-work as editor. Remembering that his age, though hale and vigorous still, is now advanced to "reverence and the silver hair," and recalling the fact that for the last decade and longer his muse has but seldom broken the silence,—the very sweetness, too, of these occasional utterances having to our fancy something of a certain rare and costly quality going to confirm the omen,—we are forced to regard this step as an unwelcome reminder that our favorite American poet has probably

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[1] The author has thought it not worth while to obliterate the marks of time which will here, as occasionally elsewhere, meet the observation of the reader.

accomplished his important poetical labors. It will not therefore be judged premature if we herewith attempt, what has thus far, and properly, remained unattempted, something like a general and exhaustive survey of his genius and achievements. We shall be confident, at least, that not a line of the thousands which, notwithstanding what we have written, we will hope yet to receive from that honored and practiced hand, could modify our estimate, otherwise than to heighten our praise. And thus we beg to avert the ungracious omen implied in contemplating his poetical career for the moment as closed.

The frequent vicissitudes of labor and recreation with which the actual years of Mr. Bryant's life have been diversified and relieved, are no doubt to be considered as illustrative of his character. It was hardly to be expected that one who, in the flush of early manhood, according to the common tradition of Bryant (which we hope no one will be at the pains to contradict), turned from the profession of law, to which he had been trained, with an instinctive and noble rebellion against what he felt to be its pettinesses and falsities, should, even in the strenuous season of middle age, have so changed that honorable softness of heart as to become unalterably firm to the at least equally rude contacts and collisions of a partisan editorship. We should half have regretted it if he had done so. It would have gone so far toward marring a favorite ideal of ours (perhaps we got it from Coleridge) touching a certain inviolate youthfulness of feeling waiting ever on the nature of the poet, and making to him the freshness and beauty of the world immortal. We trust never to see the fantasy suffer under any such ruthless iconoclasm. Mr. Bryant, indeed, has always, as editor, practiced a skill which his political antagonists have

felt to be even bitter, of straining every relenting chord of his nature to a mood of stern endurance. He is to-day, when grasping the newspaper pen, an almost savage antagonist. But then this tension is far more a matter of the will than of the heart. The will is strong, and can produce it; but so is the heart tender, and will relax it. This we take to be the secret of Mr. Bryant's alternations between uncongenial toil and studious labor.

In his last resumption of editorial duty, we make no doubt it is a manly resolution which summons him back once more to the wavering edge of a worldly strife. It suits admirably with that conception in his own grand hymn to freedom in which, boldly amending one of the world's immemorial ideals, he changes her sex, transforming a fair smiling maiden to a bearded man in panoply. We can even believe that he obeys a conscientious conviction of duty in the matter; and if so, then his act is in the spirit of all noblest poetry, let critics say what they will about the absurdity of a moral in song. Every poem has its moral, be it only in the absence of an intended moral. The author, for example, of some musical stanzas, reminiscent as we recall them, of a day's ramble with friends in the woods, when he took pains to tell us that having spread food of God's sweet bounty, they

> ate it with no grace but song,

was unconsciously pointing a moral advantageous neither to his piety, nor yet to his sense of the truest and highest beauty. It is indeed not unfrequently the case that the poet is impressing even the most instructive, while the saddest too, of moral lessons, when so far as his own merit of purpose goes, he works

> Without a conscience or an aim.

But notwithstanding the reconcilement which we may flatter ourselves thus to have found between two apparently contrasted phases of character, it must still be acknowledged that Bryant the editor and Bryant the poet could hardly be more different from each other if they were numerically distinct. It is like going from the Cave of the Winds to the "island-valley of Avilion," to pass from a leader in the "Evening Post" to one of Bryant's more characteristic poems. In truth, the editor Bryant belongs to the world as it is; the poet Bryant to the world as it will be. The editor dwells where good and evil are ceaselessly at strife; the poet where good has conquered and all is peace. The editor toils amid deformity and disorder; the poet rests in order and beauty perpetual and serene. A blending of the practical and the ideal tendency this, in a single nature, fortunate and rare indeed, yet common, we are inclined to think, to the reforming spirits of every age. They have been poets, all of them. Not all had leave to write their poetry. Milton had, and so had the stern old Hebrew prophets. Paul himself was not to be restrained from lifting up ever and anon throughout his epistles a sublime and exultant doxology, and Luther must occasionally refresh his battle-worn spirit with a hymn that pealed out like the call of a trumpet. But the patient epics of the most share in silence the earnest expectancy of the travailing creation. When God at last shall make all things new, then, in the clear and radiant forms of that final steadfast order, those of us who see it shall behold the fair ideal that they knew, and the poetry that they would have written. They endured while here as seeing that which is invisible. When we too see it, we shall understand how such an endurance could be nursed by such a vision.

The professional engrossments which have absorbed so large a share of Mr. Bryant's life, will explain in part why his poetry consists almost entirely of short, detached pieces. Several of these, it is true, have been published under the title of "Fragments," and Mr. Bryant, in a note, has given us explicit encouragement to hope that the leisures of his life may have been employed upon some more considerable labor of verse yet to appear. But he has deferred our hope so long, that he will not blame us if we begin to doubt of its final fulfilment. It is certainly to be regretted that he has not seen fit to construct some single poem of more imposing dimensions to become the repository of his fame; less, however, we imagine, on our account than on the poet's own. It is hardly probable that our inheritance from his genius would on the whole have gained as much in richness as it might in bulk thereby. But Mr. Bryant would have secured his own reputation better—so long at least as the old transmitted epic standard of *volume* continues to be applied, in professedly critical as well as in the popular appreciation, for the admeasurement of poetical genius. Mr. Longfellow may be supplanting Mr. Bryant in the general estimation. If so, some will attribute it to Mr. Longfellow's greater warmth of coloring. But we intend to maintain that it is due to nothing else in the world than the traditional veneration accorded to the man who has written a poem big enough to make a book.

But there is another reason for the fugitive character of Mr. Bryant's poetry. We have been assured by one whose opportunities of access and information entitle the statement to credit, that it has always been a virtual impossibility that Mr. Bryant should compose a continuous poem of great length. The process of poet-

ical composition, it was stated, is so exhausting to his physical powers, that those persons who demand such a work at his hands, unconsciously ask him to build his own sepulchre. The knowledge of this fact will not be unsuggestive to the thoughtful lovers of Bryant's muse. It will remind them that nearly all their author's pieces have the air of recreations. Not mere sportive recreations surely; Bryant's is a spirit far too grave to seek relaxation in pure levity and wantonness, and his verse ever loves best to sing the "still *sad* music of humanity;" but diversions from the daily use of life, in which a high-born and beautiful genius, not declining to wear a yoke during the heat of every day, claims nevertheless the cool of an evening now and then to solace and cheer itself with grateful relief of occupation. "The Ages," Mr. Bryant's longest poem, is probably to be excepted here. This was originally prepared, we believe, for the anniversary of a literary society connected with Harvard University. It is far enough removed above the level of its class, and is even a poem of a high and remarkably uniform excellence; and yet in a certain appearance of effort to sustain itself, unnatural to Bryant's performances, it undeniably fails of that perfectly unbidden and unbought spirit of freedom else everywhere prevalent.

Spontaneous and free we call the prevailing quality of Bryant's verse. It is not so, however, in the sense of a wild, heady rage, like Byron's, spurning control. Quite to the contrary of this, there reigns throughout it all, not indeed the quietude of a passionless nature, but the breathing rest of a spirit under mastery too strong to feel the disturbance of striving impulses. Byron's *flumen ingenii* might be fitly described in his own fine verse apostrophizing the Rhine:

And thou, exulting and abounding river;

Bryant's flows full, deep, placid, clear, strong, equable —with a movement swift sometimes, occasionally impetuous, but never giddy with a flattered sense of power. Byron's want of moral self-control has just about fairly represented itself in the *abandon* of his verse. He wrote poetry in very much the same reckless way that he drank wine and loved women. No one else could have written the splendid stanza commencing "The sky is changed," with a reeling brain and a staggering hand. It was perfectly in character for Byron to do it. In all this Bryant is in intense contrast. The graceful poise, the easy majesty of self-possession, with which he invariably receives the ictus of inspiration, and, conscious of no shock, transmutes it silently into diffused and regulated power, we feel sure does not excel the even control that such a man must exercise over his moral nature.

We are not now paralleling Bryant with Byron. It would hardly satisfy our comparative estimate of the two men to rank them as "brethren in power." But this we are free to say, that were they fairly matched in genius, as they assuredly are not, then we should not hesitate an instant to put the American above the Englishman—the *style* of his greatness we consider so much superior. For despite the subscription of so justly eminent a critic as Ruskin, we glory in renouncing the popular superstition that venerates as the anointed highest of bards the man who has sacred frenzies, and cries of a sudden, "I feel the God." For our part, we crown the poet who scorns alike to suffer or to feign such violent invasion and usurpation of his faculties. We experience a far intenser sympathy with power, when the descending and confident deity is met on the threshold by one stronger than he. To change the figure, we like to see the poet cavalier

"turn and wind a fiery Pegasus" indeed, and the more fiery the better, but with use of spur and curb betokening *him* the master. His speed may not equal Gilpin's, but he will make up in dignity.

Such a poet, in his measure, is Bryant, and such a one, in his larger measure, was not Byron. Whatever power it is given Bryant to summon is subject to him. The power that went with Byron somehow often seized advantage and mastered him. If it will be permitted us to draw an illustration from things that use has not yet made either common or sacred for the service of such an analogy, we might say that when we read Bryant we have the feeling of the railway passenger who is confident that his engineer will employ no head of steam of which he has not the exact measure and full command; but that when we read Byron we have the feeling of the railway passenger who holds his breath with a nameless suspicion that his engineer's brain is crazed, and that he is intent upon nothing but annihilating time and distance. Bryant's consciousness of his strength, and his perfect contentment with its measure, will not let him seek any increment of momentum from an indulged excess of rapidity in movement. Byron's force, when at its maximum, is ever a product greatly augmented by a factor of purposely hastened *precipitancy.*

We readily grant, as we keenly feel, the delicious fascination of this careering velocity. Its recklessness is contagious. It is one of the most intimate of intoxications. But it is an intoxication, and it debauches the will. Its spell unnerves us, just as we know it unnerved the poet himself. We tremble with inmost weakness. There is a nobler excitement. We prefer to dwell with power that is sovereign of itself. It may conquer us, but it shall not be by dissolving our sinews.

Nay, our own wills are conscious there of a strengthening presence. It is more than the touch of Antæus to his native earth. It is the miracle of Jacob's night of wrestling with the angel. We go stronger from that place of a mighty communion.

In harmony with the quality now illustrated, Bryant exercises a noble patience in employing the "last hand" of the artist. This, no doubt, is the labor which exhausts him. Robert Hall, according to his own testimony respecting himself, was continually tormented with the desire to preach better than he possibly could. Mr. Bryant seems to finish his poems in view of a similarly impossible standard. But Hall's ambition (as pure of selfishness we can believe it to have been as human ambition is likely soon to be) was at least worth something to the world. It spurred a splendid genius to exertions that made the greatest of modern preachers. Bryant's haunting ideal has prompted him to make such approaches to absolute perfection of finish as no other poet has made since Horace elaborated his odes.

In assigning to these two poets so high a relative position among poetical artists, we would not, of course, be understood to use the designation in its larger and more honorable significance. Neither of them sketches with the ample hand of a Michael Angelo. Neither goes out into chaos, like Milton, and creates worlds that thenceforth seem actually to add something to the substance and extent of the universe. Nothing of this. Their genius is not level to such an imitation of Omnipotence, as few men's has been. But so does not their ambition aspire to it. They busy themselves with the minor moralities of the muse. They do not invite the use of the telescope to explore their works. They are well content if the finer eye of the microscope, multiplying their graces, discovers no flaws.

The art of verse, in this more limited and humbler sense, might be defined to consist in reconciling rhyme, measure, rhythm, all the externals by which, to the eye and the ear, poetry is differenced from prose, with the most authorized use of the language—in a word, in reconciling prosody with etymology and syntax. Certain licenses are allowed to poets, by immemorial prescription. These are pretty well ascertained, generally, and are limited in number. They constitute a sort of relief fund for poets in distress. Some slight shadow of reproach, more or less, attends resort even to this. Poets ought to make it a nice point of honor never to transcend it. Novelties in poetical license are rather worse than neologisms in diction. We of course except now such departures from the law of prose as are matter of choice (for the sake of elegance) and not of necessity. These belong properly to the invention of the artist. They are suggestive of farther resources—like superfluous pots of gold on the counters of a specie-paying bank. Used with a frugal Attic taste, they produce a pleasing effect. Compulsory deviations, on the contrary, especially if without good precedents, never fail to hint disagreeably of stringency—possible insolvency.

Bad rhymes, for example, are little better than no rhymes at all. They virtually confess that the artist was beaten and had to capitulate. Our best artists are sparing of them. The instances are rare in Tennyson. Yet Tennyson, marvellous artist that he is, shall double the number that are found in Bryant, page for page.

Halting rhythm is another confession of the imperfect artist—except, indeed, where it is chosen for its effect. It is an evidence of weakness unless it is an evidence of power. High passion is said to be natu-

rally rhythmical in utterance. So it may be; but the highest passion has a rhythm of its own, and oftentimes jars a loftier music out of rugged metres. Such discord is the sign, not of the limitation, but of the excess, of power. Milton and Tennyson are masters in this kind. Mrs. Browning has passages of so high a mood, that their inharmonious music would seem to be the supreme attainment of an accomplished artist, did not the well-nigh universal prevalence of the same difficult and obstructed movement induce a doubt whether it be anything more after all than the struggle of a deficient constructive faculty. Bryant is as perfectly, though not so variously, musical as Tennyson. Tennyson's permutations of melody are apparently endless; Bryant rings some exquisite changes, but they are fewer and simpler, and they recur more frequently. A favorite artifice, for example, with Bryant, always delicately managed however, is to break the monotony of his iambic verse by the introduction of a dactylic word where a trochaic one would be regular. The apostrophe occurring in the piece entitled "Antiquity of Freedom," already alluded to, presents a fine instance:

> O FREEDOM! thou art not, as poets dream,
> A fair young girl, with light and *delicate* limbs.

It will be noticed here how beautifully the effect of aërial sculpture, which the ear apprehends in this line, accomplishes the poet's descriptive purpose.

Bryant is guiltless of neologisms, which is more than can be said of the great English laureate. He seldom forces words out of uses which are normal and kindly to them. The intervals are long at which his even flight touches the ground in a prosaic expression. This last does happen, however, occasionally. In the "Monument Mountain," a partly narrative piece of blank

verse, not unlike the minor manner of Wordsworth, Bryant tells us that the Indians are of the opinion

> that God
> Doth walk on the high places and *affect*
> The earth-o'erlooking mountains—

a word—it is entirely too common, in an ambiguous sense, to claim privilege as a classicism—which, we venture to say, so correct a taste as Mr. Bryant's would scruple to use even in prose. But the demands of versification, especially in moods of "cold obstruction," such as will clog sometimes the most fortunate genius, are not to be entreated. This poem rehearses the tradition of an Indian girl, who, smitten with love for her cousin (a passion deemed unlawful by her race), committed suicide by throwing herself from a precipice of rock. The mountain to which the precipice belonged afterward obtained the name of Monument Mountain, from its then being crowned by pious hands with a memorial pile of stones. Mr. Bryant's genius, we must think, is too essentially contemplative to feel its freedom perfectly in narration. There is, nevertheless, one incident in the poem under remark, conceived and told with a fine power of mild, penetrative pathos. The effect is not certainly the highest, but it is one of the very rarest in poetry. The melancholy maiden, with a bosom friend, the sole sharer of her secret, has climbed to the brow of the fatal precipice. The following words give the incident alluded to:

> Here the friends sat them down,
> *And sang, all day, old songs of love and death.*

The line printed here in italics is not a striking line. Its effect is not felt immediately. It needs to be pondered—to be said over thoughtfully and tenderly, again and again. Then, if we mistake not, it will begin to

assert over the rightly-prepared mind a mystical influence as of a charm. Its vowel richness, its solemn consonant harmony, its laden spondaic movement, the exquisitely affecting union and contrast in the last three words, finally, the mournful thought of those poor children of the wood soothing the lone one's "imaginative woe" to the sad issue—all these conspire to produce a very sweet effect—sweet, at least, to him who knows how to submit himself to spells in words. Is it a merely whimsical suggestion that associates this line with that "most musical, most melancholy" place of the Paradise Lost, where Milton describes how the gentler-spirited among the fallen angels solaced themselves with commemorating in dirges their valor and their misfortune?

> Others more mild,
> Retreated in a silent valley, sing
> With notes angelical to many a harp
> Their own heroic deeds and hapless fall
> By doom of battle.

The stanza in Tennyson's "Dream of Fair Women," is like in spirit, but inferior far in beauty, which speaks of that ever-recurring spectacle in history—

> Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
> The downward slope to death.

We have been tempted a little aside. We were speaking of Mr. Bryant's freedom from the various besetting peccadilloes of poets. He almost never submits to say what he did not wish to, for the sake of completing a verse or a stanza—a surrender which is far more common with the poets than might be imagined. Byron abounds in instances. The exigencies that *invite* such surrender are golden opportunities for the skilful artist. They are to him what occasions of retreat are to the skilful general. Fortunately managed they display his

resources better, oftentimes, than a brilliant success. In adroit hands these fruitful necessities have first and last given us not a little genuine poetry. They may sometimes fetter the free play of the fancy, but oftener they will prove ministers of timely suggestion. This is the reason why it is so much easier for a mediocre man to write passable rhyme than passable blank verse. It is also the reason why the most flexible, the most playful, and the airiest strains of sentiment and of fancy will so often be found to be most intricately versified. It is not more because such conceptions demand such expression, than because such expression admits such conceptions. The form gives the matter, in this case, as much as the matter gives the form. It requires a Shakespeare, a Milton (as in the "Comus"), a Tennyson, to write playful blank verse. The unrhymed songs of "The Princess" are almost solitary exceptions to the universal usage of the song-wrights of our literature. And after all, the emergencies in versification, on which genius depends for suggestions, are of no use except to genius. They are sometimes stumbling-blocks to genius, when genius is impatient of art's delays. This, however, rarely happens with Bryant.

Another specification may fairly be made at this point. Mr. Bryant has too old-fashioned a regard for the rules of grammar to consider himself at liberty to transcend them lightly. Tennyson is inclined to be somewhat "progressive" in this respect. It would be easy to show how cavalierly he treats the grammatical proprieties at times.

Now the scrupulous artist's conscience which Mr. Bryant keeps, is by no means the mere precisian's bondage to rule. There is a noble freedom in it. It is not the fond devotion that deifies and worships art as an end in itself. There is no idolatry in it. Bryant's art

is always purest nature, not impelled, but impelling itself; not restrained, but restraining itself. It is like that last attainment of the good, proposed by a profound theology. It is freedom, reconciled with the highest necessity. Unobtrusive as such results of art, like all negative excellences, must be, it is yet a separate source of peculiar pleasure, in reading poetry, to feel sure always that you are not going to meet with incessant occasion for subtractions from the total effect, on account of artistic blemishes.

We incidentally alluded to Horace, some pages back, as Bryant's parallel in finish of execution. There is not wanting some degree of likeness between the two in several respects. Horace was disqualified, by his painfully slow and laborious habits of composition, for the execution of a long poem. It might have cost him his life; but, at all events, the uniform brilliancy which his exquisite polish would have imparted to the whole would, perhaps, frustrate the proper effect of a long poem—the idea of which, we suppose, is realized in a work capable of being read and appreciated at a single sitting. A poem too long for this is not really one poem, but more; for Poe's theory has its confirmation in every man's reason and experience. But a poem by the Horace whom we know, much exceeding in length the longest of those which he has left us, would defy adequate appreciation at one sitting. The trance of *mimic* inspiration which the poet must produce in his readers to qualify them for such an appreciation, like all intense emotions, passes too soon. Horace seems to have been aware of this, and he wisely expended his power in producing poems of just manageable dimensions. Bryant has done the same, and probably for similar reasons.

These considerations, if we are wise, we shall suffer

to influence our appraisal of such men's achievements. There are poets whose quality will not wait to hear the judgment of a second thought. It resents a moment's delay as an insult. Its appeal is to a sense like the pole of a magnetic battery, which must kindle immediately or remain cold. Far otherwise is it with Horace. The man who should set out to read the Odes without bringing to his task an eye adapted by nature, and refined by culture, to look for curious felicities that demand and repay a delaying notice—forms of words absolutely perfect, like the archetypes of nature, and composing spells of power — thoughts elaborately polished and clear, like cut diamonds, but hiding away, after the manner of all most precious things, in cloistered recesses of expression—he, we say, who should undertake the Odes of Horace without a faculty of discernment for all these, and more, must consent to abide in helpless wonder that the ever-forgiven egotist's prophecy of his own unfailing longevity of fame should yet be enjoying so remarkable a fulfilment:

Exegi monumeutum ære perennius.

Each trait of Horace, now enumerated, is a point of further resemblance between him and Bryant.

It will be observed that nothing, thus far said, implies any parallel between the two as to choice of subjects. Here, in fact, the resemblance fails—less, it may be, from lack of the natural congeniality to produce it, than from difference of conditioning circumstances, though probably in a degree from both. Horace's powers of shrewd moral observation, and his long-continued urban and polite associations made him eminently a poet of men and manners. Bryant is not ignorant of the world, and he bears no morbid hatred to men, but he knows Nature better, and loves her

more. Nor seems his passion unreturned. She imparts to him a thousand secrets kept sacred from man's knowledge and speech since the morning stars sang together. It is wonderful, the number of mysteries she will breathe in his ear, and sign to his eye, and dart through his frame in electrical notices, during an hour's communion with her. She can trust them safely to him. No other is so patient to interpret them truly. Such patience could come only from such love.

Now, of course, it would be the infirmity of charity to reckon any certain poem as in the slightest degree intrinsically more valuable, simply because it cost its author nine years of labor and of waiting. Much less, however, would we admit the vulgar interpretation of that least learned of Latin commonplaces, *Poëta nascitur, non fit.* Rightly interpreted, it expresses aptly enough one of the most indubitable of facts. But as it is popularly understood, it would seem to import nothing less than that the thing poetry itself comes into existence somehow without any one's responsible agency, being, so far as concerns the poet producing it, merely a sort of fine secretion of the curiously adapted brain. Many accordingly proceed to gauge their value of a poem, as nearly as may be, in the inverse ratio of the pains known to have been expended upon it—apparently under the impression that hard work and the divine afflatus, so-called, are an impossible binomial.

Now, certainly, as between *misapplied* pains and simple carelessness, no one could think of suspending his choice for a moment. The vulgarity of art is immeasurably more disgusting than the vulgarity of nature—more disgusting because more intensely vulgar. Art, indeed, in the sense in which we are now using it, that is, to denote the pains bestowed by the artist on his work, is merely nature giving attention to

itself. It is nature in a mood of self-consciousness. Thus, to speak like a mathematician, it is limited to yield a *higher power of nature.* A genius therefore naturally constituted pure and noble, while, as a matter of course, it is always liable to be debased with vulgarity of various kinds, as coarseness (witness Shakespeare), or artificiality (witness Corneille and the French dramatists of that time generally), through the outward influence of a depraved standard of taste prevailing in a given country or period, still will only be purified and ennobled by its own freely chosen processes of self-culture. What made Madame D'Arblay exchange a style that charmed mankind by its simple graces for one that offended all by its elaborate mannerisms, was not excess of art. It was not, in its present meaning, art at all. The fact was, her genius ceased to be a law unto itself, and imitated; and imitation is not art, but affectation.

We shall hardly need to say that Mr. Bryant, whether more by the good fortune of his position in the literary republic, or by the safeguard of a singularly chaste æsthetic quality in his genius well adapted to purge off all "baser fire," has quite escaped contagion from without. Thoroughly artistic, his poetry is equally inartificial. We will not affirm that Bryant has made the most that was possible of his genius; but we have no hesitation in saying that he has made the most that was possible of his poetry. He might perhaps have achieved more had he attempted more. But thus much is certain, he has achieved whatever he has attempted. His poetry is not the loftiest, but it is the most perfect of poetry. Its ideal may be comparatively humble, but it wants little, very little, of being completely realized. We do not care to make account here of one or two poems which Mr. Bryant has written in the hu-

morous vein. His genius certainly does not laugh so naturally as it weeps. But the lines "To a Musquito" are not, in our opinion, so wholly unsuccessful as some critics, who appear to have imagined that they could pronounce safely from Mr. Bryant's acknowledged more prevailing manner, would have us think.

We are aware that we have written extraordinary praise. We shall not pretend to justify it by citations. In fact it is such praise as can be competently passed upon in review only by one who will become tolerably familiar with Bryant's poetry as a whole. His poetry is not beautiful and perfect in parts, as one's is whose inspiration comes on him by fits. It is not faultless here and there, by an occasional felicity. It is uniformly finished, by the law of his genius. Yet there are, of course, passages pre-eminent in excellence. We must be permitted to cite a few, notwithstanding that they may be already the favorites of many of our readers. The following stanza is from "The Indian Girl's Lament." The maiden's lover has died, and she chants her sorrow and her hope over his grave. In accordance with the superstition of her race she supposes her brave to have gone to the well-wooded and well-watered hunting-grounds of the blest,

> Where everlasting autumn lies
> On yellow woods and sunny skies.

She imagines that memory of *her* has directed his employments in the spirit-land:

> And thou, by one of those still lakes
> That in a shining cluster lie,
> On which the south wind scarcely breaks
> The image of the sky,
> A bower for thee and me hast made
> Beneath the many-colored shade.

The luxury of repose, the warm, the mellow, the fruc-

tuous coloring, the pictorial light, the sweet naturalness of fancy, and the luscious melody, that are associated here, make the picture magical even beyond what the magic of such an original could be.

The following lines, from "The Hurricane," are descriptive of a tropical tempest, bursting in that long, rattling, interrupted crash of thunder which even our climate sometimes hears:

> And hark to the crashing, long and loud,
> Of the chariot of God in the thunder-cloud!
> You may trace its path by the flashes that start
> From the rapid wheels where'er they dart,
> As the fire-bolts leap to the world below,
> And flood the skies with a lurid glow.

What a delicious music in the delicately alliterative line italicized below. It is from the "Green River." The poet would fain linger by that fresh meadowy water-side,

> Till the eating cares of earth should depart,
> *And the peace of the scene pass into my heart.*

Please, reader, try that over again, aloud this time, and observe with what a fine effect, as you obey the sense in protracting the quantity of the word "pass," the anapæstic movement is arrested there with a virtual dactyl, and then sent forward in an iambus. That's the scansion of it, dear reader, upon our honor. We *hope* you would not scan

> And the peace | of the scene | pass *in* | to my heart.

That would be truly regular and sad.

Running our eye again and again, here and there and everywhere, over these delectable pages, in the pauses of our writing, we are conscious of a sentiment akin to remorse at having seemed to intimate that we are culling the best passages of our poet, or even that there is

any inequality of excellence observable at all. It is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Bryant's delineations of nature are more beautiful than nature itself—or, to speak more exactly, that the effect on us wrought when we read, surpasses that wrought when we observe. For, in the first place, Mr. Bryant can show us nature precisely as he sees it, and few of us have an eye like his; and, in the second place, there is the superadded pleasure of the imitation. He thus does *more* for us than his own sweet verse makes the odor-laden land breeze do for the home-sick mariner on the sea, where it is said that,

> Listening to its murmur he shall deem
> He hears the rustling leaf, and running stream.

It is such an illusion and something besides. And should we also add here another element which will seem almost incompatible with the perfect fidelity that we have attributed to him as a limner of nature—namely, that he diffuses over his pictures somehow always a charm of his own tender, half-pensive subjectivity?

> The *quivering glimmer* of sun and rill.

> And darted up and down the butterfly
> That seemed a *living blossom of the air*.

> The *housewife bee* and humming bird.

> They have not perished—no!
> Kind words, remembered voices once so sweet,
> Smiles, *radiant long ago*,
> And features, *the great soul's apparent seat*.

Addressing Freedom, supposed to confront his ancient, though "later-born," enemy—Tyranny:

> The grave defiance of thine elder eye.

But there must be a limit to quotations, and we will stop with a couple of stanzas from the little poem entitled "June." This poem rehearses a poet's reasons

for preferring a pleasant rural resting-place for his dust to any other. We remember to have been, last summer, one of a little company of friends who walked out late in the "all-golden afternoon" of a serenely beautiful day, to visit such a spot in a quiet country town in New England. We gathered near the sacred marble, and stood, silent or talking in low voices of him who rested there, when, in an interval of silence, one of our number, hardly interrupting it, began to recite the little poem under remark. Line after line, and stanza after stanza, its sweetness and appropriateness appeared so exquisite that she who had given that pleasant meadow-mound the most was tranced in tearful musing. As if by common consent, lingering yet a thoughtful moment or two, we moved slowly and silently away—but *she* was not satisfied until the poem was secure in her possession. But here are the promised stanzas:

I know, I know I should not see [1]
  The season's glorious show,
Nor would its brightness shine for me,
  Nor its wild music flow;
But if, around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
  They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light, and bloom
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their softened hearts should bear
  The thought of what has been,
And speak of one who cannot share
  The gladness of the scene;
Whose part, in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills,
  Is that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
To hear again his living voice.

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[1] Since this essay was written Mr. Bryant has amended the first line to read,

I know that I no more should see.

The tenderness and delicacy of thought and the melody of rhythm in this little piece are unsurpassed. The execution not only cannot be improved, but what is more, it needs no improvement. We cannot help thinking, however, that Mr. Bryant stayed his hand at least one stanza too soon. That Christian mourner whom his verse comforted would, we are confident, have been doubly grateful had he gone on to speak, as *he* could speak, of other fields, golden under another light. It was surely worthy of a Christian poet to open *such* a landscape upon the hills of immortality. It could not have marred the artistic perfection of his work to beautify a picture so beautiful, by transfiguring it in unborrowed light.[1]

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[1] We venture to print the following lines by way of rudely illustrating our idea. The stanza which they may possibly serve in some degree to hint to the imagination of the reader, would, according to our conception, immediately succeed the last of the two quoted in the text, and thus conclude the piece:

> Then gently o'er their hearts at last
> A soothing change should steal—
> The darkness of the pensive past,
> A sense like dawn should feel;
> The tearful memory of their friend
> In tranquil tearful hope should end,
> The scene a scene reveal,
> Where breeze, and song, and light, and bloom
> Have found a land without a tomb!

We at first amused ourselves with trying how easily, by a few changes, the closing stanza of the poem might be turned from its aspect toward the past, and made to deal with "the other distance." It seemed more exquisitely in harmony with the avowedly cheerful tone of the piece, that it should end with anticipation rather than retrospect. But then it was undoubtedly a true touch of nature to let a song which had bravely undertaken to rejoice against great Death, have somewhere in it a cadence of "more prevailing sadness." Still, was there not one further possibility, both of naturalness and of beauty, in making it finally recover, or *almost* recover, the key with which it started? We imagine that here was a place where the wayward poetic fancy might safely have its will quite unchecked—like an Æolian harp.

Years we remember intervened between the writing of Tennyson's "May Queen" and the adding of the "Conclusion." It would be a noteworthy and noble thing if Mr. Bryant should yet put his hand to the task of furnishing a like supplement to one of his purest and sweetest inspirations. The appropriateness of the conception almost forgave the temerity of the attempt and the crime of the forgery, when a few years ago a gentleman in Maine published a short poem purporting to be a "Sequel" to the "Thanatopsis" by the hand of Mr. Bryant. It was too crudely versified for the hand that has lost none of its cunning since composing the marvellous harmony of the "Thanatopsis" at eighteen, and it was otherwise disfigured by blemishes; but as the writer proceeded, by way of completing the idea of Bryant's famous conclusion, to tell how (we quote from memory of seven or eight years ago), when we

> Have passed our night-time in the vale of death,
> And struck our white tents for the *morning* march,
> We shall move forward to the eternal hills,
> Our foot unwearied and our strength renewed
> Like the strong eagle's, for the upward flight!

really these closing lines seemed to us lighted up with a transient gleam of not much inferior majesty.

We are not accusing Mr. Bryant of the fault—though there are one or two conspicuous instances in which he has made us wish to see him avoid it by a wider margin —when we venture to suggest that too much poetry is written now-a-days as if we had not yet unlearned heathenism. Is heathenism more poetical than Christianity? Is it not true that Christianity has shed over all things a new consecration—"the light that never was, on sea or land?" We submit that it is something besides wickedness for the heirs of eighteen Christian centuries to write poetry as if they were heathen.

Talleyrand might pronounce it folly worse than wickedness. It does not seem out of place, nay, it excites an emotion thrilling and solemn, even to the verge of sublimity, to come upon such a paragraph as the following, in the pages of Ruskin ("Seven Lamps of Architecture"):

> I have paused, not once nor twice, as I wrote, and often have checked the course of what might otherwise have been importunate persuasion, as the thought has crossed me, how soon all architecture may be vain, except that which is not made with hands.

This is noble, and who will assume to say that such language does not become a Christian critic and author? We do not mean to put forth any over-strained notions about this matter, for we entertain none. We are far enough from desiring to gird either author or artist about with a stringent sense of obligation to be always thrusting forward a religious or moral lesson. We believe in poetry that would not come under the category of either "Divine" or "Moral" songs. We believe in art that represents other than Biblical subjects. There is ultimate authority for the opinion that whatever is not directly hostile to God is friendly and helpful. We have just been alluding to the instance of an Englishman still living and in the prime of his powers, who, uniting earnest piety to elegant taste, without degrading either, has devoted a lifetime to the single province of art-criticism, so-called. A narrow judgment might perhaps consider this an unworthy devotion of earnestly Christian genius. We think otherwise. But to Mr. Ruskin himself it must be a confirmation of his conscientious choice, as unexpected as gratifying, to know that a celebrated American preacher is largely indebted to him for that astonishing faculty of illustration which, more than any other one thing, has made his pulpit

seem to be a power on this continent. This unanticipated utility of a labor which would have been amply contented could it only transfer the myriad influences of art as teacher to the side of "the true, the beautiful, and the good," goes to prove the words of the poet, that

> liberal applications lie
> In art as nature.

We shall learn by and by that Heavenly Wisdom allows for wide distances sometimes between causes and effects, and that the Divine purposes are accomplished with much division of labor.

As the "Thanatopsis" is at once the best known, and one of the finest as well as one of the earliest of Mr. Bryant's productions, and as, moreover, it enjoys the distinction of being the first American verse that won a European recognition, we have supposed that it might gratify some of our readers to see this poem in the form which it wore when originally given to the public in "The North American Review." When the conductors of that periodical first examined the piece, they affirmed that it could not be of American origin. They thought it too perfect in its versification. It will be noticed, however, that Mr. Bryant has re-touched it since then with great success. A comparison of this early text of the "Thanatopsis" (itself, no doubt, painfully elaborated) with that which appears in his latest editions will illustrate what we have said on preceding pages of Mr. Bryant's admirable patience and unfailing taste in finishing his work. The critics of a former day, in announcing the alterations, express concern lest the poet might have committed the error of so many, and marred with an after-hand the first beauty of his workmanship. But their apprehension was groundless. It is a foregone conclusion that Mr. Bryant's artistic

labor is always well bestowed. Here is the "Thanatopsis," as it appeared in "The North American Review" for September, 1817:

Not that from life, and all its woes
  The hand of death shall set me free;
Not that this head shall then repose
  In the low vale most peacefully.

Ah, when I touch time's farthest brink,
  A kinder solace must attend;
It chills my very soul, to think
  On that dread hour when life must end.

In vain the flatt'ring verse may breathe
  Of ease from pain, and rest from strife,
There is a sacred dread of death
  Inwoven with the strings of life.

This bitter cup at first was given
  When angry *justice* frowned severe,
And 't is th' eternal doom of heaven
  That man must view the grave with fear.

——————— Yet a few days, and thee
The all-beholding sun shall see no more
In all his course; nor yet in the cold ground,
Where thy pale form was laid, with many tears,
Nor in th' embrace of ocean shall exist
Thy image. Earth, that nourished thee, shall claim
Thy growth, to be resolv'd to earth again;
And, lost each human trace, surrend'ring up
Thine individual being, shalt thou go
To mix forever with the elements,
To be a brother to th' iusensible rock
And to the sluggish clod, which the rude swain
Turns with his share, and treads upon. The oak
Shall send his roots abroad, and pierce thy mould.
Yet not to thy eternal resting place
Shalt thou retire alone—nor couldst thou wish
Couch more magnificent. Thou shalt lie down
With patriarchs of the infant world—with kings
The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,

All in one mighty sepulchre. The hills,
Rock-ribb'd and ancient as the sun,—the vales
Stretching in pensive quietness between;
The venerable woods—the floods that move
In majesty,—and the complaining brooks,
That wind among the meads, and make them green,
Are but the solemn decorations all,
Of the great tomb of man.—The golden sun,
The planets, all the infinite host of heaven
Are glowing on the still abodes of death,
Through the still lapse of ages. All that tread
The globe are but a handful to the tribes
That slumber in its bosom.—Take the wings
Of morning—and the Borean desert pierce—
Or lose thyself in the continuous woods
That veil Oregan, where he hears no sound
Save his own dashings—yet—the dead are there.
And millions in those solitudes, since first
The flight of years began, have laid them down
In their last sleep—the dead reign there alone.—
So shalt thou rest—and what if thou shalt fall
Unnoticed by the living—and no friend
Take note of thy departure? Thousands more
Will share thy destiny.—The tittering world
Dance to the grave. The busy brood of care
Plod on, and each one chases as before
His favourite phantom.—Yet all these shall leave
Their mirth and their employments, and shall come
And make their bed with thee!——

The points of difference between the above and the present state of the poem are worthy of note. In the first place, the original draft does not appear to have any *aim*. It is, in fact, *remarkably* aimless. It is simply an accumulation of images and reflections about death, in themselves neither very striking nor partaking of any definite character, as consolatory or otherwise, but expressed in singularly harmonious and even majestic verse. We should not blame the conductors of the "Review" if they had declined the piece on account of the defect now pointed out. It would have been

very foolish, however, and we are glad they did not. It was evidently Mr. Bryant's first care, in the revision, to give the poem a determinate *direction*. This he does by means of sixteen new introductory lines, substituted for the original proem, in which also he takes occasion to mend the broken verse that stood first before—thus relinquishing a privilege which, since the date of this poem, has become nearly or quite obsolete even in amateur poetry. It was better, too, that an introduction in a heterogeneous metre should disappear, even at the cost of those two lines in the third stanza which we have taken the liberty to italicize. The object, as now conveyed in the most mellifluous of verse, is to draw from Nature what solace she may have for us in view of "God's ordinance of death." Will it be ungracious to hint that Mr. Bryant, in impressing this character upon the poem, has not quite avoided a fault of incongruity. At least it is not easy to see how the poet could have found his meditations very consoling. If such a strain of musing fairly represents the best that Nature can do, we pity the pantheists, and all others her children, who are shut up to suck at the breasts of her consolations. Perhaps it does, and the Maine forger, whose success might seem more encouraging, possibly was interpreting Nature in a light not her own when he discovered symbolisms of immortality in the resurrections of springtime. We are nowise sure that simple Nature is in the least degree a more sympathizing mother than Mr. Bryant represents her to be.

Another improvement was the appending of a magnificent conclusion,—completing a broken line again,—in which occurs the only word in the whole piece, as it now stands, which a cultivated heathen might not have written,—"*trust*." That saves it, but it might have been saved more abundantly. The attentive eye will

mark the numerous minor changes throughout the body of the poem. Some of these depend on reasons of meaning, of taste, and of rhythm, that will elude all but the nicest observation. How nobly, for example, it complements the enumeration to add to "hills," and "vales," and "brooks," and "rivers" that last particular,

> and poured round all,
> Old ocean's gray and melancholy waste.

The substitution of "rivers" for "the floods," besides being in itself an improvement, and an improvement as allowing the omission of the article (which both for the sense and the euphony were better away), enriches at once the variety and the grandeur of the rhythm. It is plainly finer to say:

> The venerable woods—*rivers* that move
> In majesty———

than

> The venerable woods—*the floods*, etc.,

and for yet a further reason, which is likely to have been the suggestive one of all, namely, that it avoids the jingle between "woods" and "floods." The change of "glowing" to "shining"—

> The golden sun,
> The planets, all the infinite host of heaven
> Are *glowing*, etc.,

is perhaps the best *time*-mark that the comparison furnishes. "Glowing" belongs evidently to the fervent period of youth, "shining" to the cooler age of later life. The younger poet sacrificed keeping, even truthfulness of description, to a more striking word—the older was content to merge a specific in the general

effect, by using the word that was simply natural and appropriate. Immediately following the "Thanatopsis" in the Review, is the "Inscription for the Entrance to a Wood," under the title of "A Fragment." A collation of the two forms of this poem would be a further study of great interest in Mr. Bryant's art of finishing verse; but we have already transcended the limits which we had prescribed to ourselves, and we forbear.

We indicate in a closing paragraph the opinion which we think will in the end be generally formed of Mr. Bryant's merits as a poet. Coleridge has somewhere recorded his judgment that of all vocations that of the poet can least afford to dispense with undivided and unintermitting attention on the part of him who aspires to supreme excellence in it. If we admit the correctness of this judgment (and on precisely such a point, we should not know where to look for a higher authority than Coleridge), it will be very nearly equivalent to acknowledging that Mr. Bryant, in paying as he has done only an extremely desultory suit to the Muses, has chosen his rank among the goodly fellowship of the minor poets of our language. What different fame might perchance have been his, had he, like Wordsworth, devoted himself exclusively to poetry, it were idle to conjecture. As it is, while his poetry seldom if ever displays anything of that fine, that ethereal light, mingled of philosophy and the imagination, which at intervals so transforms the otherwise uninspired manner of Wordsworth, we are free to adventure the assertion, that in the article of description, thought by some to be the crowning excellence of the great English master, Bryant easily surpasses him — though here again it is to be confessed that he has perhaps nowhere attempted description on so grand a scale as, for example, that of the magnificent sunrise scene in the first book of

"The Excursion," or the still more splendid cloudscape toward the close of the second. A picture of Bryant's may be idealized like a Raphael, but it will never violate the sacred truth of nature. The sunbeam has hardly more reverence for the truth in representation than has Bryant. We doubt if there is a line or even so much as one word of description in his volumes that might not be rigorously verified from the right aspect of nature. And his poetry is "racy of the soil." His scenery is not Grecian, nor Italian, nor yet English, but American scenery. This characteristic belongs to his perfect sincerity and truthfulness. He is a national poet, simply because he is a genuine poet—just as every man who truly represents human nature at large will also, in its proportion, represent a nationality. But he is not in any sense the poet of a party—political, social, literary, philosophical, or religious—like some of his countrymen that might be mentioned. The charm of his poetry therefore is purely poetical. The estimation which he enjoys is due in no degree to local or temporary circumstances. It cannot diminish save in the necessary and natural perspective of the expansion of literature, and of time. There is no example in the language of a purer poetical diction than Bryant's. The vocabulary that might be made from his poetry would be a "well of English undefiled." And the moral quality of his verse—we have no fear of profaning a sacred phrase—it is *clear as crystal.* There is absolutely nothing anywhere in all that he has written, either said or left suggestively unsaid, that would not show clean and white against the cheeks of the mountains—

> Where they purely lift
> Snows that have never wasted in a sky
> Which hath no stain.

And it is not merely innocence, that may be ignorant of temptation. It is virtue, that has been exercised and crowned. He is sufficiently subjective to make us feel that his own nature, and the whole of it, is on the side of Right and Duty. He utters words

That make a man feel strong in speaking truth.

Indeed we suspect that it is this severe purity which some have condemned for coldness. But Bryant is not cold. He does not, like Byron and Schiller, seek by unnatural stimulants to exhibit an unnatural *hectic* flush of passion. But we misread "The Death of the Flowers," the "Green River," "The Rivulet," "The Past," and many other of his pieces, if they are not suffused with a roseate glow which is far enough from frigidness. His passion is taken up into the intellect and the imagination and sublimated there, but not extinguished. It *is* extinguished, however, to those who have long received "familiar the fierce heat" of Byron. Mr. Bryant's prevailing tone is undoubtedly mild and contemplative. His is, pre-eminently, the "harvest of a quiet eye." He wins the most from nature when he finds her gentle and placid in her moods. And it is easy with him for the lid to grow heavy with tears while the eye looks out on man or nature. The minor key of sadness, which belongs to all our deepest emotions, and perhaps points to the great tragedy of the race, runs through Bryant's poetry. But he is not always either mild or sad. "The Song of the Stars," the "Song of Marion's Men," "The Hurricane," and some other pieces, are instinct with the authentic lyrical fire. There is not a finer specimen of its kind in the language than "The Hurricane." Bryant has been charged with monotony in treatment. There is ground for the charge, yet any one who will read in comparison,

"The Evening Wind," "The Summer Wind," and "The Hurricane," must confess that he was not monotonous for want of a very considerable range of power. "The Antiquity of Freedom" has a breadth, a vigor, and a loftiness in it almost Miltonic. Mr. Bryant left college, we believe, without completing his course, but he stayed long enough to snatch those nameless graces of culture which no length of stay could impart to anything but genius. His pages accordingly, have the garnish of occasional classicisms, not frequent, but always in exquisite taste. He also practises that incommunicable art—more than anything else perhaps a crucial test of genius—by which words, single words, are impregnated and polarized and made many-sided prisms of multiform suggestion. He has apparently never wrestled with great spiritual doubts and fears. At any rate his verse does not incline at all to "handle spiritual strife." For this reason he will not exercise an important office as teacher. This has been given to poets not a few, but Mr. Bryant is not of the number. He will, however, fulfil a mission as beautiful in furnishing language for the gentler emotions and the purer experiences of many a grateful heart. There will never come a time when the good will wish that his mission were ended.

MR. BRYANT'S ILIAD.

IT is a felicity hardly to have been conjectured that has crowned the literary career of the Nestor among American poets. We say crowned it, for whatever fruit of genius the fortunate old age of Mr. Bryant may hereafter produce, it would be less in the nature of a marvel than of a miracle, if it should produce anything worthy to take precedence in men's esteem of this noble translation of the Iliad of Homer, safe now in happy completion. We join our loyal suffrage to the well-nigh unanimous verdict which assuredly awaits from the universal republic of letters, to pronounce Mr. Bryant's work the nearest approach that has thus far been made to that final English Homer which has been looked for in vain so long. It would, no doubt, partake of the weakness of extravagance to say that Mr. Bryant has achieved an absolutely ideal success. We do not, however, deem ourselves extravagant in maintaining that he has given us a vernacular Iliad which is not only entitled to supersede for popular use all the other existing versions in English, but is moreover good enough to render every future attempt to do better superfluous and waste. The elusive shade of the Greek has disappointed many a sanguine proffer of ferriage across the river that separated him from citizenship and wont among the haunts of English speech. It would be rash thus early to

affirm that Mr. Bryant has fairly got him over. But certainly no ferryman ever tempted him to cross with promise of the freedom of so luxurious an Elysium of English verse before.

There are several features of Mr. Bryant's achievement which conspire to make it a memorable incident in modern literary history. In the first place, it is noteworthy enough that a man of seventy, at no period of his life specially addicted to Greek learning, should conceive so arduous a project as the translation of the Iliad. And, by the way, it supplies an exceedingly gracious illustration of the amenities which seem so well to befit the fellowships of literature and of genius, that Mr. Bryant should have had the genial deference, in a serene old age removed from jealousy, to obey the generous behest which Mr. Longfellow and Mr. Lowell, in their strenuous prime superior to envy, had the admirable discernment to lay upon him to undertake this work. Mr. Fields wrote to Mr. Bryant for a poetical contribution to "The Atlantic Monthly." Mr. Bryant's portfolio at the time was otherwise empty, but he sent a fragment of Homeric translation that happened to be there. The two poets, Longfellow and Lowell, found it so good, that they immediately joined in insisting that Mr. Bryant should become the translator of Homer. In the second place, the celerity with which Mr. Bryant dispatched his task deserves commemorative note. The life-long literary habit and facility of Pope, and his easy conscience concerning the duty of a translator, did not enable him, in the flush of his fame and in the full maturity of his powers, to translate the Iliad in less than five years—the time which Mr. Bryant has occupied in doing it, urged by a very different sense of obligation to his original, and in the late evening of a life exhausted upon pursuits that

must have gone far towards dissipating a natural aptitude for quick handiwork in letters, never, we suspect, too great. It almost pathetically attests the "sad mechanic" industry with which he sought nepenthe in his toil for that "great domestic sorrow" alluded to, with nobly characteristic reserve, in his preface. But the circumstance which makes his success most remarkable of all is one less obvious than either of these to general notice. Homer belonged to an age and a race almost antipodally removed from Mr. Bryant's. This, to be sure, is a disqualification common to Mr. Bryant with every contemporary English translator of Homer. But Mr. Bryant, as an interpreter of Homer, had the individual disqualification of being intensely contrasted with him in the quality of his genius, and, so far as we can judge, in the quality of his personal character. Homer lived in a world full of Greek life, and light, and laughter, and song. Everything was outward to him. "Milk" was "white" and "blood" was "red," and neither the meanest nor the highest flower that blows ever gave him a thought that was too deep for a lucky compound adjective to express. He was not proud and self-conscious in the vocation of his genius. He was well content to be a minstrel. He did not aspire to be a poet. He had capacity for it, but no ambition. He was sometimes a poet. But it was always, as it were, in his own despite. He was generally quite satisfied to be the accepted ballad-wright of petty princes—the minstrel-laureate of their savage tricks and brutal brawls. Brawn and muscle, trappings and steeds, spears and shields, tilts and tourneys, were the sufficient matter of his song. To set these forth in brave style, he made the sacred aspects of nature and the august solemnities of religion, such as religion was to him, menial and servile. He describes

the multitudinous march of serried waves advancing to deliver their "surging charges" against a rocky coast —but it is without a thought of the awful sublimity of the scene. He desires only to make his picture life-like. The forming battle-line of the Greeks, filing forward to the war, resembles it. At another time the flight and clangor of cranes answer his purpose of lively narration as well, to describe the movement of an army to battle. Nothing is too great and nothing is too mean to be contraband of his use, if it will only render the particular matter in hand a shade more real to the apprehension of his volatile auditors. In short, Homer lacks dignity, and consequently lacks the sense which proportions the respect that is due to the graduated hierarchies of the universe of persons and of things. How different in all these respects Bryant is from Homer, no one familiar with Bryant's poetry needs to be told. Grave, sedate, meditative, dignified—Bryant is a poet in the highest sense of the highest vocation to which nature can ever anoint a man. It shows a quality in him not to have been guessed from his previous performance, that he should be able to stoop so gracefully, as in this translation he does, from his height of moral elevation above the plane of Homer. We do not think he does stoop all the way down. Homer is raised unconsciously a few degrees to meet him.

It would not have been incongruous if Mr. Bryant's publishers had placed his own venerable portrait in a frontispiece over against the traditionary face of Homer. The two would have made a striking pair of counterparts. The imagination would have only to supply the illusive effect of indefinite antiquity, in order to make the American merit, as well as the Ionian, the exaggerated picture of hoary eld, drawn

with the spirit of filial reverence, in the younger manner of Tennyson :—

> And there the Ionian father of the rest;
> A million wrinkles carved his skin;
> A hundred winters snow'd upon his breast,
> From cheek, and throat, and chin.

We purpose in this paper to trace the steps by which we arrived at our estimate of the comparative value of Mr. Bryant's translation. Broad characterization and summary statement are satisfactory only in the case of a book that has been so long a literary classic as rightly to be supposed already familiar to the general cultivated reader. Then it is one of the best contentments of the critical mind to be furnished with a formulated expression of its own inarticulate judgment upon the merits of that with which it has first become comprehensively acquainted. In the case of a new book, however, the process of the reviewer has need to be different. He has himself hardly had time, as yet, to get beyond the two or three stages of crude impression that almost always precede the mature critical judgment in which he is willing finally to rest. Besides this, the reader must depend, in considerable part, upon the opportunities the review itself will furnish for forming that acquaintance with the book, upon the basis of which he is asked to agree with the sentence of the reviewer. We shall have, accordingly, to beg the indulgence of our readers if we enter somewhat more fully into the reason and illustration of our verdict than has elsewhere been done in the noticing of this important contribution to the wealth of American literature. It will perhaps be as good an order of treatment as any, to follow the course of our own first examinations of the volumes.

We opened to the introductory lines. These have always been admired as exhibiting either the best skill

or the best luck of the original poet. They are simple, direct, clear, complete, free from superfluity—and melodious. They would naturally, on every account, engage the highest art of a translator to render them well. We arrived independently at this obvious conclusion, and then happened upon a confirmation of it in glancing over Cowper's correspondence during the period in which he was occupied in executing his translation of the Iliad. He said that the first seven lines cost him more trouble, and yielded him less satisfaction, than any other equal portion of the poem. To say sooth, Cowper did, contrary to the thrifty proverb, put his worst foot forward. It would be hard to select nine less happy consecutive lines in the whole course of his translation, than the nine into which he turns Homer's first seven. Some critic has remarked in comparison of the two that Cowper takes nine decasyllabic lines to Bryant's eight, for the Greek's seven hexameters. It happens indeed to be true that here Cowper is more diffuse than Bryant, but Cowper's general manner, on the contrary, has the advantage of greater compactness than Bryant's. Thus Bryant uses seven hundred and seventy-two lines to Cowper's seven hundred and fifty-two for the first book—one thousand one hundred and two to his one thousand and seventy-five for the second, and the like proportion holds, we think, throughout. Neither the one nor the other is apparently disturbed with any wish not to break up the original crystallizations of sense and of melody which determined the metrical divisions of the Greek. Yet it was a true insight that led Newman to seek a line-for-line version — a quest, however, not justified in his case (perhaps hardly possible to be justified in any) by the whole success of his work. Worsley, selecting the Spenserian stanza for his medium, necessarily gave up the idea of preserving

the effect of rhythmical progress by verses, and aimed only at reproducing the different but equally real effect of rhythmical progress by passages. His success is such as might surprise one who had prejudged the event of the experiment by the superficial unfitness of the Spenserian stanza for Homeric translation. Norgate translates line for line with great literalness and evident good scholarship, but then the poetry has all been conscientiously volatilized away in the process. Bryant enjoys a sense of entire freedom in moulding his rhythm without regard to his original's, and in expanding epithets, for example, into lines. This feeling of liberty serves him admirably. The result is a story in verse, certainly not so clear-lined, naïve, vivacious, as the original narrative, but fluent, continuous, onward, nevertheless—satisfactory, for instance (we speak from proof) to boys who like Scott and—shall we associate them?—Oliver Optic.

But we are to examine Mr. Bryant's rendering of the first seven lines of the Iliad. To put the reader not familiar with Greek upon a footing of some competency to judge for himself precisely how far the original is modified to suit the choice or the necessity of the several translators whom we set into comparison with each other, we have been at the trouble to throw it into a metrical English form of our own, which, for mere matter of fidelity and literalness, may be taken upon trust as close enough to pass muster, on that score, in a college class-room. A prose rendering, even if it hugged the Greek more closely still, would not suit our purpose so well, for the reason that metre, of some sort, and the address of a metrical form to the eye, constitute too essential an element of the peculiar poetic effect, to be dispensed with for a moment by any one who desires to enter into the essential spirit of a passage

of poetry. If some reader has supposed that true poetry is independent of form, let him try the experiment of getting his favorite passage of the "Paradise Lost," for instance, printed exactly as prose. He will hardly be able even to gather its sense, to say nothing of the impossibility of feeling its beauty. Here is Homer's opening, in a literal translation:—

> The anger, goddess, sing, of Peleus' son,
> Achilles—anger dire, that on the Greeks
> Brought myriad woes, and many mighty souls
> Too soon of heroes unto Hades sent,
> And gave themselves a ravin to the dogs
> And to all birds of prey—howbeit the will
> Of Zeus fulfilled itself—even from the time
> That first they two, Atrides, king of men,
> And high Achilles, wrangling fell apart.

Mr. Bryant translates as follows:—

> O Goddess! sing the wrath of Peleus' son,
> Achilles; sing the deadly wrath that brought
> Woes numberless upon the Greeks, and swept
> To Hades many a valiant soul, and gave
> Their limbs a prey to dogs and birds of air,—
> For so had Jove appointed,—from the time
> When the two chiefs, Atrides, king of men,
> And great Achilles, parted first as foes.

For the sake of the comparison, we subjoin Cowper's rendering, and Derby's. Of Derby's version, as a whole, it may be said that it does very well for a nobleman—very well. It is the gold of poetry in the lead of rhetoric. The metal is not quite so precious, it is true, but then the hammering is really very faithful and good. We shall have no further occasion to allude to Derby's work. Here is Cowper, in his best attempt and his poorest success. What shall we say of the critic's taste who speaks well of it, and selects the sesquipedalian fourth line for the finest, only objecting that it is per-

haps "too suggestively Miltonic?" Well, we suppose Milton is suggested by it, but then so he is by Philips's "Splendid Shilling."

> Achilles sing, O Goddess! Peleus' son;
> His wrath pernicious, who ten thousand woes
> Caused to Achaia's host, sent many a soul
> Illustrious into Ades premature,
> And Heroes gave (so stood the will of Jove),
> To dogs and to all ravening fowls a prey,
> When fierce dispute had separated once
> The noble Chief Achilles from the son
> Of Atreus, Agamemnon, King of men.

Derby translates thus:—

> Of Peleus' son, Achilles, sing, O Muse,
> The vengeance, deep and deadly; whence to Greece
> Unnumbered ills arose; which many a soul
> Of mighty warriors to the viewless shades
> Untimely sent; they on the battle plain
> Unburied lay, a prey to rav'ning dogs,
> And carrion birds; fulfilling thus the plan
> Devised of Jove, since first in wordy war,
> The mighty Agamemnon, King of men,
> Confronted stood by Peleus' godlike son.

Our readers are now prepared for a little criticism in detail. Homer, let it be remembered, puts the word, generally, but not felicitously, translated "wrath," which states the subject of his poem, in the very forefront of his argument. Virgil imitates this order in the Æneid, and so does Milton in the Paradise Lost. Mr. Bryant, it will be observed, in accordance with the more idiomatic English order of words, gives the invocation itself local precedence of the subject of which the goddess is invoked to sing. Homer is able, by virtue of the inflection of the Greek adjective, and by virtue also of the great license allowed him in the Greek disposition of words, to resume, in effect, the first em-

phatic statement of his theme, by beginning his second line with an epithet, "fell," in characterization of the "wrath," named in the line preceding. Bryant apparently aims at reproducing this feature of his original, without violence to the English syntax, by repeating the substantive "wrath," at the same time that he qualifies it, in his second line, but along with it he incidentally repeats also the imperative verb, thus again emphasizing the invocation, which was of the very lightest possible importance in Homer's own verses. Some good scholars deny that the Greek verb translated by Bryant "swept," has in it the force of "untimeliness," which Cowper makes so prominent by his adjective-adverb "premature." Mr. Bryant, therefore, perhaps intentionally eliminated this force from his translation. If so, he suggested the alternative force of forward impetus very satisfactorily by "swept." But what shall we say of his omitting the word "heroes"? Can we agree with the newspaper critic already alluded to that it is almost "expletive"? Probably it is so; but it happens too that the pleonasm is exactly that which to our own feeling most of all conveys the epic pathos of the argument. The Greek word is nobly rich in lengthened vowel sounds, and altogether it seems to us, beyond any other single expression in it, charged with the chief poetic charm and dignity of the entire passage. We will not disguise our regret that Mr. Bryant did not choose to render it. The true Homeric antithesis is between the heroes and their souls, rather than between the heroes and their bodies. At least, according to the text, it is not their "limbs," but "themselves," that dogs and vultures rend. Not to follow the original here is to obscure the materialistic dualism of Homer by substituting the spiritualistic dualism of a Christian philosophy. The translation

gains, however, to its English form what it loses from the Greek spirit. When Mr. Bryant translates "*For* so had Jove appointed," he certainly misrepresents the relation in which this parenthesis stands to the context. Δε does not mean "for"—here as everywhere it is adversative, however lightly so. It introduces a certain pious recollection and reminder that notwithstanding the misfortunes suffered by the Greeks, the will of Zeus was all the while in process of fulfilling itself. Mr. Bryant's translation stands alone in acknowledging the effect of the Greek dual in "the two chiefs."

Thus much of minute criticism of Bryant's opening. It is just to say that his opening, though better than those of his rivals, is by no means a specimen of Bryant at his best.

Here is a second citation which will present Homer in the transient dignity of a poet. Bryant, we think, renders him nobly. But first we give our non-classical readers the advantage of a strictly literal version:—

> Zeus spake, and with his dark brows gave the nod:
> The ambrosial locks therewith streamed from the king's
> Immortal head; Olympus great it shook.
> These two, thus having counselled, parted; she
> Leapt thereupon into the deep sea-brine
> From bright Olympus—to his dwelling Zeus.
> The gods together all rose from their seats
> Before their sire, nor any durst abide
> Him coming, but they all to meet him stood.
> So he there sat him down upon his throne;
> Nor seeing him was Here not aware
> That with him had deliberated plans
> The daughter of the Ancient of the sea,
> Thetis of silver foot. With cutting words,
> Straightway the son of Kronos, Zeus, she hailed.

Bryant translates as follows:—

> As thus he spake, the son of Saturn gave
> The nod with his dark brows. The ambrosial curls

Upon the Sovereign One's immortal head
Were shaken, and with them the mighty mount
Olympus trembled. Then they parted, she
Plunging from bright Olympus to the deep,
And Jove returning to his palace home;
Where all the gods, uprising from their thrones,
At sight of the Great Father, waited not
For his approach, but met him as he came.
  And now upon his throne the Godhead took
His seat, but Juno knew—for she had seen—
That Thetis of the silver feet, and child
Of the gray Ancient of the Deep, had held
Close council with her consort. Therefore she
Bespake the son of Saturn harshly, thus:—

If we apply a strict verbal criticism here, we find that Jove's hair does not, according to Homer in this place, consist of "curls"—and that his locks are not represented as "shaken," but as "flowing" out from his head. "Trembled" does not literally translate a transitive verb.

Plunging from bright Olympus to the deep

makes a remarkably well-sounding line, but it hardly bears verbal inspection. The Greek verb does not mean "plunge," but "leap." But, at any rate, the notion of "plunging" does not sort well with the light glancing movement proper to the goddess, and happily implied in Homer's word. Even if the Greek meant plunge, the plunging would not be "to," but "into," the sea; and the original preposition corresponds. The truth seems to be that the aërial space intervening is disregarded by the poet, and Thetis lightly leaps from Olympus into the brine—the Greek word for sea here is derived from its saltness—without sensible lapse of time for making the descent from the mountain through the air. "Plunge" is decidedly too onomatopoetically heavy to be a happily chosen word. Bryant's epithet

"Great" is his own. He omits what seems to us a distinctively significant word—ἔτλη—translating simply "waited not," instead of "*durst* not wait." "The Godhead" again is paraphrase. This is of course exceedingly minute criticism. But we shall have done with the microscope presently.

The first book closes with a sort of relief scene, memorable and dear to every lover of Homer. The description of the feast of the gods in Jove's palace, with Vulcan playing the office of Ganymede, comes in between the gloomy terror of the pestilence and the series of battles that follow, like a flute interlude amid a thunder of music detonated from an orchestra with anvils and ordnance, under Mr. Gilmore's enterprising conduct. We turned to this in order to satisfy ourselves how Mr. Bryant's grave manner would adapt itself to the different mood of Homeric humor and gayety. The passage, literally translated, reads as follows:—

> He spake; the goddess, white-armed Here, smiled;
> And smiling she accepted with her hand
> The goblet from her son. But he from right
> To left to all the other gods poured out
> Sweet nectar, drawing from the mixing-bowl;
> And inextinguishable laughter then was roused
> Among the blessed gods, when they beheld
> Hephæstus brisking through the palace halls.
> So all day long unto the setting sun
> They feasted then, nor of an equal feast
> Failed the desire in aught, not of the harp
> Exceeding beautiful which Phœbus held,
> Or of the Muses who with beautiful voice
> Alternate sang responsive each to each.
> But when the sun's resplendent light was set,
> Desiring to lie down they homeward went,
> Each where for each the far-renowned lame
> Hephæstus built a house with cunning skill.
> The Olympian Flasher of the Lightning, Zeus,
> Went to his couch where erst he wont to lie

> When sweet sleep came on him; ascending there
> He slept, and Here, golden-throned, beside.

Bryant translates:—

> He spake, and Juno, the white-shouldered, smiled,
> And smiling took the cup her son had brought;[1]
> And next he poured to all the other gods
> Sweet nectar from the jar, beginning first
> With those at the right hand. As they beheld
> Lame Vulcan laboring o'er the palace-floor,
> An inextinguishable laughter broke
> From all the blessed gods. So feasted they
> All day till sunset. From that equal feast
> None stood aloof, nor from the pleasant sound
> Of harp, which Phœbus touched, nor from the voice
> Of Muses singing sweetly in their turn.
> But when the sun's all-glorious light was down,
> Each to his sleeping-place betook himself;
> For Vulcan, the lame god, with marvellous art,
> Had framed for each the chamber of his rest.
> And Jupiter, the Olympian Thunderer,
> Went also to his couch, where 't was his wont,
> When slumber overtook him, to recline.
> And there, beside him, slept the white-armed queen
> Juno, the mistress of the golden throne.

We are not sure that "white-shouldered" is altogether a happy modification of the Homeric "white-armed." The act and gesture of Vulcan in his unaccustomed part of cup-bearer are graphically brought out by Homer in one highly specific Greek word, which Bryant's general term "laboring" does not quite fairly render. The reason for the celestial laughter is not made self-evident by the translation, as it is by the breathing original word. The onomatopœia in the

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[1] Pope renders the first two lines thus:—

> He said, and to her hands the goblet *heav'd*,
> Which, with a smile, the white-armed queen receiv'd.

We judge that the necessities of rhyme, rather than Pope's sense of humor in description, must be held responsible for "*heav'd*."

Greek participle almost moves laughter itself by its vivid truth to the life of the scene. "O'er" and "floor" disturb the reader's sense of harmony a little with an unintended rhyme. Mr. Bryant makes a palpable mistake when he translates: "From that equal feast none stood aloof." The meaning is that in no respect did the appetite lack its full satisfaction. We cannot judge how the description of the feast would affect one reading it for the first time in Mr. Bryant's translation. For ourselves, we seem to miss here the effect of softness, and lightness, and beauty, and sweetness of sound that the Greek verses have always had upon our sense, like silver globules of melody floating out from a musical bell. When Mr. Bryant translates as if Homer gave to all the gods their customary quarters in the palace of Jove, he misrepresents the Olympian economy. The greater divinities, according to Homer, had separate establishments of their own on the mountain. When the day's feast at Jove's expense was closed with the close of the day, they all, like sensible divinities, betook themselves home, to taste the wholesome refection of celestial sleep. The line,

> And Jupiter, the Olympian Thunderer,

has a jingle in it of similar unaccented syllables, which makes it less melodious than Mr. Bryant's ear in general demands that his verses should be. Besides, he makes an exchange of apposition—substituting here Jove's attribute of thunder for his attribute of lightning.

We shall not have occasion to enter into the minutiæ of criticism so largely again. We cite once more a specimen of the Homeric fun—premising that as befits the occasion Homer's vocabulary and his syntax take

on a kind of sympathetically contemptuous carelessness in describing Thersites. We translate literally :—

> The rest sat down, and in the seats were quelled.
> Thersites only still kept clamoring on,
> Licentious-tongued ; who many a shameless phrase
> Knew in his mind, hap-hazard, lawlessly
> To brawl with kings—whate'er might seem to him
> To be droll for the Greeks. The ugliest man
> That came to Ilium ; bandy-legged he was,
> Lame in one foot ; and his bent shoulders twain
> Hugged o'er his chest together, while above
> Peaked of head was he, and thereupon
> A thin-worn plush of flossy hair adhered.

Bryant's rendering is as follows :—

> All others took their seats and kept their place ;
> Thersites only, clamorous of tongue,
> Kept brawling. He, with many insolent words,
> Was wont to seek unseemly strife with kings,
> Uttering whate'er it seemed to him might move
> The Greeks to laughter. Of the multitude
> Who came to Ilium, none so base as he,—
> Squint-eyed, with one lame foot, and on his back
> A lump, and shoulders curving toward the chest ;
> His head was sharp, and over it the hairs
> Were thinly scattered.

Mr. Bryant is not at his strongest in interpreting a piece of Greek raillery. The perfect transition of manner in Homer from grave to gay hardly gets itself represented. In truth Mr. Bryant is too essentially dignified and nobly self-respecting to obey the fickle phases of Homer's mercurial mood with natural grace. In spite of Mr. Bryant's predetermined fidelity, Homer finds himself transferred, in all his varying inflections, to pretty much one key—the self-recollecting epic—in his new English form. This grave severity appears to special advantage in the rendering, for instance, of one of Homer's proverbs. The weighty Anglo-Saxon

monosyllables into which they are turned, have often a singular fitness and force.

As was to have been conjectured, Cowper does better than Bryant where the Greek laughs. Here is Cowper's rendering of the description of Thersites:—

> Cross-eyed he was and, halting, moved on legs
> Ill-paired; his gibbous shoulders o'er his breast
> Contracted, pinched it; to a peak his head
> Was moulded sharp, and sprinkled thin with hair
> Of starveling length, flimsy and soft as down.

The sad humorist, whose poorest fun is his best-known, "The Diverting History of John Gilpin," is plainly to be recognized in every turn of this rendering.

With this Hogarthian humor of Homer's (which had, perhaps, a serious purpose in it of representing democracy contemptuously in the person of a demagogue), we set in contrast a passage, from the sixth book, tender with the sparkle of tears such as, but for this passage, we should hardly have known, from coëval literature, that other than Ruth and the Hebrew women used to weep in those old times. Andromache was evidently no Spartan wife or mother. Perhaps it was the hyper-Homeric human womanliness apparent in these lines that attracted the attempt of Mrs. Browning to render them. We give her translation as a matter of interesting comparison with the others. It is not of such quality as to excite regret that she did not oftener put her muse into the harness of Homeric translation. It is fair to say that she entitles her fragment a "paraphrase," and that the effect of the whole is better than that of the detached portion which we shall presently give. First we furnish once more a literal version:—

> So having said, resplendent Hector reached
> To take his child. But backward he, the child,

Toward the fair-girdled nurse's bosom drew,
Crying, abashed at the dear father's looks,
And frightened by his mail; he saw the crest
Of horse-hair from the summit of the helm
Terribly waving, eying it; outright
Both the dear father and queen mother laughed.
Straight from his head resplendent Hector took
The helm, and placed it glittering on the ground.
When he besides had kissed his darling son
And tossed him in his hands, alike to Zeus
And to the other gods praying, he spoke:

* * * * * *

So having said, he gave into the hands
Of the dear wife the boy; she, tearfully
Smiling, to her sweet bosom[1] took him then.
Regarding her the husband pitied her;
Both with his hand he soothed her, and he spoke:

Mrs. Browning is violently unmetrical, almost beyond parallel even in her original writings.

Thus Hector spake, and stretched his arms to his child.
Against the nurse's breast, with childly cry,
The boy clung back, and shunned his father's face,
And feared the glittering brass and waving hair
Of the high helmet, nodding horror down.
The father smiled, the mother could not choose
But smile too. Then he lifted from his brow
The helm, and set it on the ground to shine:
Then, kissed his dear child—raised him with both arms,
And thus invoked Zeus and the general gods:—

* * * * * * *

With which prayer, to his wife's extended arms
He gave the child; and she received him straight
To her bosom's fragrance—smiling up her tears.
Hector gazed on her till his soul was moved;
Then softly touched her with his hand and spake.

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[1] Was Milton's "Her bosom smelling sweet" (P. L., vii., 319) a conscious recollection of Homer? The punctuation that, with a comma after "bosom," refers the "smelling sweet" to "herbs" preceding, gives a tame sense hardly Miltonic. No comma appears in the fac-simile reproduction of Milton's own edition.

Mr. Bryant:—

> So speaking, mighty Hector stretched his arms
> To take the boy; the boy shrank crying back
> To his fair nurse's bosom, scared to see
> His father helmeted in glittering brass,
> And eying with affright the horse-hair plume
> That grimly nodded from the lofty crest.
> At this both parents in their fondness laughed;
> And hastily the mighty Hector took
> The helmet from his brow and laid it down
> Gleaming upon the ground, and, having kissed
> His darling son and tossed him up in play,
> Prayed thus to Jove and all the gods of heaven:—
>
> * * * * * *
>
> So speaking, to the arms of his dear spouse
> He gave the boy; she on her fragrant breast
> Received him, weeping as she smiled. The chief
> Beheld, and, moved with tender pity, smoothed
> Her forehead gently with his hand and said:—

Mr. Bryant does not hesitate, when it will serve his verse, to exchange an epithet. Indeed he justifies the practice in his preface. Here he substitutes "mighty" as descriptive of Hector, for "brilliant," or "resplendent"—an Homeric adjective which seems to be strictly physical, not at all moral, in its reference. Hector is sometimes spoken of as "large," like the other heroes of the Iliad. The word "mighty" vaguely implies something different from great size—imports, that is to say, into the expression a moral quality not present in the Greek. We are disposed to admit Mr. Bryant's principle; but the most characteristic feature of Hector's personal appearance is not his size—it is his sheeny look. One epithet descriptive of this Mr. Bryant himself translates with inimitable felicity—"Hector of the beamy helm." Hector always thus enters the field of tournament as a phenomenon of glittering exterior. Something therefore no doubt is lost to the authentic

effect by this particular exchange of adjectives. "The lofty crest" should be "the top of the crest" or helm. Mr. Bryant has the courage to translate "laughed," where some translators have felt it incumbent upon them to soften to "smiled." But Mr. Bryant supplies "in their fondness" as a kind of justifying interpretation of the parental levity under the circumstances. The fact is, that Homer not only says "laughed," with perfect equanimity, but strengthens the strong word by an adverb—ἐκ. This intensive, in fact, is the original poet's apology for what might superficially seem an unreasonable surrender to gayety on the part of Hector and Andromache at that fateful moment. The pent emotion of the two loving hearts found simultaneous excuse in a common occasion for letting itself out. It was translated, on the way to expression, according to a wont of high-wrought emotion, into an apparently contrary language. Instead of weeping, it laughed—a consummate touch of nature in Homer that so many good poets ought not to have overlooked. Another trifling point wherein Homer's translators departing from Homer depart also from nature, is in making Hector toss his boy up in his "arms" instead of his "hands." The great Hector was a warrior and not a nurse. His hands were large enough and strong enough to toss his infant son. It would not be manlike to have done it with his arms. Bryant escapes the mistake—perhaps by not rendering the word.

We make the microscopic strictures that we do to exhibit the difficulties with which a translator of the Iliad has to cope. To accomplish everything to be desired was impossible. A choice among the desirable things was necessary. Mr. Bryant chose to save his English poetry, though the Greek should suffer a little, and to aim at a faithful general effect, even at the ex-

pense of exquisite fidelity in detail. We have no question that his choice was wise.

We add one of Homer's most nobly conceived and most nobly expressed similes. It occurs in the Fourth Book, lines 422–426. Bryant's rendering equals it in majesty—perhaps not quite in curious fitness as a simile. Here is the Greek in a literal translation:—

> As when upon a many-echoing shore,
> Billow fast following billow of the sea
> Is roused beneath the thronging western wind,
> Upon the deep at first it towers its height,
> And next, shattered against the continent, booms
> Mightily, and round the crags its curling crest
> Uprears, and spouts its spray of brine afar,
> So ranks fast following ranks of Danaäns then
> Ceaselessly on and on thronged to the war.

Mr. Bryant:—

> As when the ocean-billows, surge on surge,
> Are pushed along to the resounding shore
> Before the western wind, and first a wave
> Uplifts itself, and then against the land
> Dashes and roars, and round the headland peaks
> Tosses on high and spouts its spray afar,
> So moved the serried phalanxes of Greece
> To battle, rank succeeding rank, * * *

This is full of the resonance of ocean. If we scan it in careful collation with the Greek, we shall miss in the version the remarkable symmetry of verbal correspondence which makes the two terms of the simile in the original match each other with artistic precision.

We cull a few instances from among the many, of those perfect felicities of translation which mark the hand of a master. In the Fourth Book, line 396 is as fortunate for its fidelity to the Greek as it is for its smooth joinery of words in the English:—

> The men of yore laid level towns and towers.

In the Seventeenth Book, in lines 513–514, we have this:—

> The iron din
> Rose through the waste air to the brazen heaven.

We do not know how anything could be more magnificent than this for description of the metallic replication of sound between the battle-field and the sky. It is strictly Homer's, too, as well as Bryant's.

The Eighteenth Book contains the famous description of the shield of Achilles, on which Vulcan wrought in relief so many varied devices, complete in symbolic beauty, as could never have occurred but to a poet living in a land of artists. We cannot speak too highly of the extraordinary felicity of Bryant's version of this extended passage. The constraint of translating seems to be felt rather as spur than as curb to his genius. The resources of his native tongue press themselves upon him as of their own accord to supply his vocabulary of apt and agreeable words. The permutations of melody in rhythm are instinct with a life of their own, and the kaleidoscope of his verse revolves self-moved, exhibiting combinations of sound in an endlessly flowing series of effects invariably surprising and beautiful. We should need to quote it all to show its wonderful beauty; but we content ourselves with the opening lines. Observe with what a kind of exultation, like the *gaudium certaminis*, the translator enters upon the work. *Fervet opus* in the English verse, even as it glowed in Vulcan's forge:—

> And first he forged the huge and massive shield,
> Divinely wrought in every part,—its edge
> Clasped with a triple border, white and bright.
> A silver belt hung from it, and its folds
> Were five; a crowd of figures on its disk
> Were fashioned by the artist's passing skill,

For here he placed the earth and heaven, and here
The great deep and the never-resting sun
And the full moon, and here he set the stars
That shine in the round heaven,—the Pleiades,
The Hyades, Orion in his strength,
And the Bear near him, called by some the Wain,
That, wheeling, keeps Orion still in sight,
Yet bathes not in the waters of the sea.
  There placed he two fair cities full of men.
In one were marriages and feasts; they led
The brides with flaming torches from their bowers,
Along the streets, with many a nuptial song.
There the young dancers whirled, and flutes and lyres
Gave forth their sounds, and women at the doors
Stood and admired. Meanwhile a multitude
Was in the forum, where a strife went on,—
Two men contending for a fine, the price
Of one who had been slain. Before the crowd
One claimed that he had paid the fine, and one
Denied that aught had been received, and both
Called for the sentence which should end the strife.
The people clamored for both sides, for both
Had eager friends; the heralds held the crowd
In check; the elders, upon polished stones,
Sat in a sacred circle. Each one took,
In turn, a herald's sceptre in his hand,
And, rising, gave his sentence. In the midst
Two talents lay in gold, to be the meed
Of him whose juster judgment should prevail.
  Around the other city sat two hosts
In shining armor, bent to lay it waste,
Unless the dwellers would divide their wealth,—
All that their pleasant homes contained,—and yield
The assailants half. As yet the citizens
Had not complied, but secretly had planned
An ambush. Their beloved wives meanwhile,
And their young children, stood and watched the walls,
With aged men among them, while the youths
Marched on, with Mars and Pallas at their head,
Both wrought in gold, with golden garments on,
Stately and large in form, and over all
Conspicuous, in bright armor, as became
The gods: the rest were of an humbler size.
And when they reached the spot where they should lie

In ambush, by a river's side, a place
For watering herds, they sat them down, all armed
In shining brass. Apart from all the rest
They placed two sentries, on the watch to spy
The approach of sheep and hornèd kine. Soon came
The herds in sight; two shepherds walked with them,
Who, all unweeting of the evil nigh,
Solaced their task with music from their reeds.
The warriors saw and rushed on them, and took
And drave away large prey of beeves, and flocks
Of fair white sheep, whose keepers they had slain.
When the besiegers in their council heard
The sound of tumult at the watering-place,
They sprang upon their nimble-footed steeds,
And overtook the pillagers. Both bands
Arrayed their ranks and fought beside the stream,
And smote each other. There did Discord rage,
And Tumult, and the great Destroyer, Fate.
One wounded warrior she had seized alive,
And one unwounded yet, and through the field
Dragged by the foot another, dead. Her robe
Was reddened o'er the shoulders with the blood
From human veins. Like living men they ranged
The battle-field, and dragged by turns the slain.
There too he sculptured a broad fallow field
Of soft rich mould, thrice ploughed, and over which
Walked many a ploughman, guiding to and fro
His steers, and when on their return they reached
The border of the field the master came
To meet them, placing in the hands of each
A goblet of rich wine. Then turned they back
Along the furrows, diligent to reach
Their distant end. All dark behind the plough
The ridges lay, a marvel to the sight,
Like real furrows, though engraved in gold.
There, too, the artist placed a field which lay
Deep in ripe wheat. With sickles in their hands
The laborers reaped it. Here the handfuls fell
Upon the ground; there binders tied them fast
With bands, and made them sheaves. Three binders went
Close to the reapers, and behind them boys,
Bringing the gathered handfuls in their arms,
Ministered to the binders. Staff in hand,
The master stood among them by the side

Of the ranged sheaves and silently rejoiced.
Meanwhile the servants underneath an oak
Prepared a feast apart; they sacrificed
A fatling ox and dressed it, while the maids
Were kneading for the reapers the white meal.
  A vineyard also on the shield he graved,
Beautiful, all of gold, and heavily
Laden with grapes. Black were the clusters all;
The vines were stayed on rows of silver stakes.
He drew a blue trench round it, and a hedge
Of tin. One only path there was by which
The vintagers could go to gather grapes.
Young maids and striplings of a tender age
Bore the sweet fruit in baskets. Midst them all,
A youth from his shrill harp drew pleasant sounds,
And sang with soft voice to the murmuring strings.
They danced around him, beating with quick feet
The ground, and sang and shouted joyously.
  And there the artist wrought a herd of beeves,
High-horned, and sculptured all in gold and tin.
They issued lowing from their stalls to seek
Their pasture, by a murmuring stream, that ran
Rapidly through its reeds. Four herdsmen, graved
In gold, were with the beeves, and nine fleet dogs
Followed. Two lions, seizing on a bull
Among the foremost cattle, dragged him off
Fearfully bellowing; hounds and herdsmen rushed
To rescue him. The lions tore their prey,
And lapped the entrails and the crimson blood.
Vainly the shepherds pressed around and urged
Their dogs, that shrank from fastening with their teeth
Upon the lions, but stood near and bayed.
  There also did illustrious Vulcan grave
A fair, broad pasture, in a pleasant glade,
Full of white sheep, and stalls, and cottages,
And many a shepherd's fold with sheltering roof.
  And there illustrious Vulcan also wrought
A dance,—a maze like that which Dædalus,
In the broad realm of Gnossus once contrived
For fair-haired Ariadne. Blooming youths
And lovely virgins, tripping to light airs,
Held fast each other's wrists. The maidens wore
Fine linen robes; the youths had tunics on
Lustrous as oil, and woven daintily.

> The maids wore wreaths of flowers; the young men swords
> Of gold in silver belts. They bounded now
> In a swift circle,—as a potter whirls
> With both his hands a wheel to try its speed,
> Sitting before it,—then again they crossed
> Each other, darting to their former place.
> A multitude around that joyous dance
> Gathered, and were amused, while from the crowd
> Two tumblers raised their song, and flung themselves
> About among the band that trod the dance.
> Last on the border of that glorious shield,
> He graved in all its strength the ocean-stream.

We were not able to forbear, and we have given the whole passage. It is no fault of Mr. Bryant's if the devices for the shield present some practical difficulties for artistic realization. It would take an artist at least as divine as Vulcan, we should say, to manage the *time* element in the various spirited actions which crowd the disk of this remarkable shield. But it is easy to feel the energy that animates the description, whatever impossibilities it involves for actual representation in pictures to the eye. This lengthened citation may suffice to illustrate the splendid qualities which certainly make Mr. Bryant's translation easily superior to any of its rivals.

We may seem to some to have been extravagant in our praise. We assuredly shall not seem to any to have been wanting in sincere appreciation. We now proceed to establish our sobriety by a few necessary qualifications of the high eulogy which we have pronounced upon the work as a whole.

In the first place, then, we discover no marks in these volumes of any such Greek scholarship, on the part of the translator, as would make him an authority to be consulted on a doubtful point of rendering. He seems to us to slip, now and then, in the trained scholar's nice knowledge and acquired intuition of the

Greek, just as we should expect a man to slip who had given his life to pursuits so remote as Mr. Bryant's have been from the cultivation of exact learning. We have incidentally furnished some exemplifications already. A few more will set our judgment in still clearer light.

There are four consecutive lines (436–439) in the First Book descriptive of the debarkation of Ulysses with the surrendered captive, Chryseïs, which all commence with the same words, *ἐκ δέ*. They are thus impressed with a strongly marked individuality, besides deriving an extremely vivacious and graphic narrative force. Mr. Newman strives to reproduce the effect. He translates :—

Then out they tossed the mooring-stones and bound to them the stern ropes,
And out themselves did disembark upon the rough sea-margin,
And out they brought the hecatomb for arrowy Apollo,
And out from that sea-coursing ship Chryseïs last descended.

Mr. Bryant's rendering betrays no wish on his part to follow his original with any curious fidelity: they

cast the anchors and secured the prow
With fastenings. Next, they disembarked and stood
Upon the beach and placed the hecatomb
In sight of Phœbus, the great archer. Last,
Chryseis left the deck, * *

Again in the Fourth Book (line 524), he renders *ἀποπνείων* "gasping for breath," which is too free for a phrase that means "breathing *forth* the soul"—expiring.

If we compare Cowper and Bryant, in the rendering of a few lines in the Fourth Book, we shall find a contrast which shows the Englishman to have had either a less sensitive care for his native idiom, or else a finer

instinct for the spirit of the Greek. Cowper translates, following the order and inversion of Homer's words, especially in placing "shuddered" twice at the beginning of a line:—

> Shudder'd King Agamemnon when he saw
> The blood fast trickling from the wound, nor less
> Shudder'd himself the bleeding warrior bold.

We should never dream of any peculiar force of abrupt transition and sudden announcement in the original, from Bryant's entirely uninfluenced and unsympathetic rendering:—

> When Agamemnon, king of men, beheld
> The dark blood flowing from his brother's wound,
> He shuddered. Menelaus, great in war,
> Felt the like horror.

Probably, however, it is only that Bryant was more concerned for the idiomatic purity of his English order.

It is a nice point to decide how far exact scholarship should be allowed to fetter the play of genius, or of tact, in the work of translating an author like Homer. In general, Mr. Bryant is literal enough: though the two passages just cited are cases in which, no doubt, the naturally meditative muse of the translator might profitably have taken a lesson from the narrative skill of his original.

We have gleaned these instances in no carping spirit. We do not set any factitious value on mere scholarship. Genius has the secret of understanding genius quite beyond the hope of laborious learning. Mr. Bryant at least is not guilty of negligence in aught that concerns the structure of his verse. His accents and quantities generally (not quite uniformly) are irreproach-

able. He manages proper names with the skill of one who has learned, or, rather, of one who never needed to learn, that, rightly ordered, they add the ultimate charm to the witchery of verse, while, ordered amiss, they turn poetry into prose. Barely once we have observed a choice in the form of a proper name in which authority and elegance alike seem violated. Why "Cephalonians" instead of the less commonplace-seeming and better authorized "Cephallenians?"[1] By the way, is it an error of the press, or a very uncharacteristic trip in English grammar, which occurs near the line containing the word "Cephalonians?" Mr. Bryant makes Nestor say, in reminiscence of his early days,

> If I *were* then a youth, old age in turn
> Is creeping o'er me.

What Nestor really says is, "If I *was* then a youth." "Were" is a quite irreducible solecism where it stands.

Mr. Bryant made no secret of having, in his first edition, inadvertently skipped a line, and perhaps several consecutive lines, in one or two places, in the course of his translation. This has not happened, as it could not have happened, where the continuity of the narrative was involved. One newspaper critic, an amateur scholar whose *nom de plume* is familiar to the literary readers of the periodical press, made a "find" of an omission which was not an omission. It is well known that the celebrated description at the close of the Eighth Book, whose brilliant mistransla-

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[1] The form "Cephallenians" occurs elsewhere—from which we may conclude that the form criticised is an error of the press—almost the only one that has met our attention.

tion by Pope provoked that fruitful criticism from Wordsworth[1] and very likely in consequence the noble restoration by Tennyson—it is, we say, well known that this passage contains two lines which the best editorship of the Greek text regards as an interpolation by transference from another place in the Iliad. Tennyson, to be sure, translates them, and fine lines he makes of them, too; but Mr. Bryant no doubt left them out intentionally and advisedly. In no case did the virtual integrity of Mr. Bryant's first edition suffer from

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[1] Essay Supplementary to the Preface, Wordsworth's Poems, Ed. 1815. It may interest the reader to compare Pope's version with Tennyson's and with Bryant's:—

Pope:—

> The troops exulting sat in order round,
> And beaming fires illumin'd all the ground.
> As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
> O'er heaven's clear azure spreads her sacred light,
> When not a breath disturbs the deep serene,
> And not a cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene;
> Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
> And stars unnumbered gild the glowing pole,
> O'er the dark trees a yellower verdure shed,
> And tip with silver every mountain's head;
> Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise,
> A flood of glory bursts from all the skies:
> The conscious swains, rejoicing in the sight,
> Eye the blue vault, and bless the useful light.
> So many flames before proud Ilion blaze,
> And lighten glimmering Xanthus with their rays:
> The long reflections of the distant fires
> Gleam on the walls and tremble on the spires.
> A thousand piles the dusky horrors gild,
> And shoot a shady lustre o'er the field.
> Full fifty guards each flaming pile attend,
> Whose umber'd arms, by fits, thick flashes send.
> Loud neigh the coursers o'er their heaps of corn,
> And ardent warriors wait the rising morn.

Tennyson:—

> So Hector said, and sea-like roar'd his host;
> Then loosed their sweating horses from the yoke
> And each beside his chariot bound his own;
> And oxen from the city, and goodly sheep
> In haste they drove, and honey-hearted wine
> And bread from out the houses brought, and heap'd

the slight chance omissions that he made. His dismay on discovering them, we venture to say, was not shared, except in sympathy, by the purchasers of his volumes.

It has not, we believe, belonged to the fortunes of Mr. Bryant's career to imbue his mind deeply and continuously from an early age with the spirit of the literature of Greece. In consequence probably of this there

---

> Their firewood, and the winds from off the plain
> Roll'd the rich vapor far into the heaven.
> And these all night upon the bridge of war
> Sat glorying; many a fire before them blazed:
> As when in heaven the stars about the moon
> Look beautiful, when all the winds are laid,
> And every height comes out, and jutting peak
> And valley, and the immeasurable heavens
> Break open to their highest, and all the stars
> Shine, and the Shepherd gladdens in his heart:
> So many a fire between the ships and stream
> Of Xanthus blazed before the towers of Troy,
> A thousand on the plain; and close by each
> Sat fifty in the blaze of burning fire;
> And champing golden grain, the horses stood
> Hard by their chariots, waiting for the dawn.

Bryant :—

> So, high in hope, they sat the whole night through
> In warlike lines, and many watch-fires blazed.
> As when in heaven the stars look brightly forth
> Round the clear-shining moon, while not a breeze
> Stirs in the depths of air, and all the stars
> Are seen, and gladness fills the shepherd's heart,
> So many fires in sight of Ilium blazed,
> Lit by the sons of Troy, between the ships
> And eddying Xanthus: on the plain there shone
> A thousand; fifty warriors by each fire
> Sat in its light. Their steeds beside the cars—
> Champing their oats and their white barley—stood,
> And waited for the golden morn to rise.

Tennyson's translation, aromatic as it is with Homer's quality, is somewhat racy too of the translator's genius. In short, it does not escape a trace of very delightful mannerism. Bryant's version more successfully obliterates the translator's individuality, merging it in that of his original. Pope's paraphrase is what might have been expected from a born poet of society in a case where brilliant words and polished metres would not serve in place of simple truth to life and nature.

is absent everywhere throughout his volumes that delicate hint of Hellenic idiom in diction and syntax, which, when present in a just degree of it, so delightfully recalls the original to the stimulated taste and imagination of the classical reader. We know very well that the vernacular idiom would be in danger of suffering somewhat from the scholar's too fond indulgence of his Greek in translation. But a degree or two more of this influence frankly admitted by Mr. Bryant would, we think, have imported into his work a certain antique and exotic aroma that, without making his translation at all less immediately intelligible to non-classical readers, would have communicated to them some share of that liberalizing and refining effect of classical studies which lies in the habituation to think in the thought, to feel with the feeling, and to speak by the speech of a wholly different and long extinct race of one's kind. Instead of a modern English poem, dashed in its very syntax and diction with this flavor of antiquity and of Greece, Mr. Bryant has given us a modern English poem in unadulterated purity — foreign and ancient only in that wherein it could not possibly be naturalized to us and to our times—its subject, its scene, its characters, its plot, its incidents, and its machinery. Many good judges will say that we have been describing a perfect translation. Precisely so; and that is the fault we are now finding with Mr. Bryant. His translation is too perfect. He has too successfully realized his own ideal of his task. He might easily have been more influenced by scholarship than he ought to have been; but, as the case stands, he has been influenced by scholarship somewhat less than he ought to have been. In decanting the "Homeric juice" from the original amphora, he has not lost the body flavor of poetry in the wine, like Derby and Norgate; but its peculiarly Greek

bouquet he has allowed in part to escape him. What genius could do he has done; but he has not done quite all that scholarship could do. The part of genius alone is greatly preferable to the part of scholarship alone; but transcendent genius, like Mr. Bryant's, in the alliance of scholarship equal to it, would have given us an Iliad that the English-speaking world must now learn, no doubt permanently, to do without. The classicism ingrained with the texture of the "Paradise Lost," the authentic spirit of Greece or Rome that saturates such poetry as the "Ulysses," or the "Lucretius," will do far more toward naturalizing the imaginative English reader in those obsolete and alien habits of mind which still so strangely fascinate the taste and culture of Christendom, than would a whole library of Greek and Latin poetry in a translation that too completely translated.

Considered simply as English composition, Mr. Bryant's version, for noble purity and fitness of diction, is beyond all praise. The English language has, in our opinion, hardly ever known the hand of a firmer and surer master than Mr. Bryant. We are not certain that he wields all its resources, but the share of its resources that he does wield, he wields with a tranquil sense of command, highly re-assuring and invigorating to the mind of his reader. The ease with which his lines flow into each other, unobstructed by the occurrence of a single forced or unnatural word, is really wonderful. It is even almost too great. It half affects one with a misgiving lest this facile versification and this faultless vocabulary be due to some want of distinct and vivid conception on the part of the translating poet, such as, if he possessed it, would be likely to surprise him, here and there, into departures from his unimpeachable propriety of expression. We think rather that Mr. Bryant's felicity

in these respects is the genuine brand of that mastership in his art which, wherever it exists, has in some degree always the effect to make the inexperienced feel that he too could do so easy a thing himself, if he should try.

We have implied a high estimate of Mr. Bryant's blank verse. It is indeed admirable workmanship. It fails very little, if it fails at all, of being worthy to constitute in its kind a variety by itself—an honor which it would share with the choice peerage of so few other poets that you could count their names on the fingers of one hand. We mention Shakespeare, Milton, and, doubtfully, Tennyson, and leave it to our readers to complete the list to their own liking. The fault by which Bryant's blank verse fails, if it fails, of this supreme excellence is—monotony. We write the word reluctantly; for Bryant's monotony has a wide range of inflections, some of them distinctively and exclusively his own; but he repeats these too often, and the result is monotony, notwithstanding the variety. We were curious enough to test by a count the value of our impression that there was an almost manneristic recurrence of the principal harmonic pause after the seventh syllable of the line. We made an average from the first three hundred lines of the fourth book of his translation, in comparison with the first three hundred lines of the fourth book of the "Paradise Lost." We found that while in Bryant the pause returned to its place after the seventh syllable about once in every six lines, in Milton it does not return there oftener than about once in fifteen lines. We have a further suspicion, which, however, we have been at no pains to justify, that Mr. Bryant's line has a tendency, elsewhere than between the seventh and eighth syllables, to divide itself on the arsis instead of the thesis of the foot. This may not be a blemish in his handling of his measure. We are dis-

posed, in fact, to think that that position of the pause has a certain onward and hastening effect upon the movement which is favorable to the purposes of narration. After all, a still wider compass of variety in his verse would have gone a long way toward converting the rarely failing melody of it into that rich and complex harmony which delights us like the interwoven strains of an orchestra in the majestic poetry of Milton.

The fact of Mr. Bryant's following so numerous a succession of Homeric translators has alike its advantages and its disadvantages, as concerns his own success. No one, of course, would think of making a new version without first examining those already in existence. He would naturally thus enrich his vocabulary with additional words appropriate to his use, and he would also materially lessen his risk of going astray, following a light of his own, on a question of rendering. On the other hand, a man of sensitive literary conscience would incur the chance of having desirable modes of expression, likely enough to have suggested themselves spontaneously to his own mind, thus obtruded upon his notice from without, and thereby rendered distasteful for his use. If the advantages preponderate, it is deserved praise to say that Mr. Bryant's use of them has been as wise as it has been honorable.

It would have been easy to pass a cursory glance over these comely pages, and form a superficial judgment on the merits of Mr. Bryant's work. A hasty characterization might then have been hazarded, to satisfy the momentary curiosity of readers who like to know the current opinion of the last new book. But, from the nature of the case, no really valuable judgment could have been thus precipitately formed. It was not sufficient even to examine carefully, in comparison with the original and with other versions, a few

marked passages upon which, from their celebrity among scholars and people of taste, a translator would be sure to bestow his best pains and skill. The critic who hoped to write a sentence on which he would be willing himself permanently to stand, was under necessity of doing more than either or than both of these things. He must read and re-read, in various moods, at flood-tide and at ebb-tide of enthusiasm for his translator; he must read now with minute attention, and now he must read with a passive receptivity for the general effect of long passages, and then, at intervals, he must collate the rival versions with a generous eye and ear, and, for the time, a favorably prepossessed mood, for the best impression from them all. Only so could one be sure of arriving, not to say at the final verdict of the literary world, at the final verdict of his own sober mind.

For ourselves, every prepossession disposing us favorably to Mr. Bryant's work, we read it at first with the grateful assent of unreserved admiration. We were immediately ready to pronounce it by eminence the Iliad of the English-speaking nations. Then followed a more deliberate investigation of its claims; and we were obliged to confess to some abatement of our delight. Occasional negligences of scholarship, as we thought, an obtrusive absence, there and here, in favorite passages, of that indefinable Greek spirit which we had perhaps ourselves unconsciously injected into the original, a suggested monotony in the mould of the lines—these defects, real or imaginary, disturbed the feast of our satisfaction for a while. But subsequent reading, and especially extended reading at a single time (perhaps the truest test of excellence in the translation of a poem originally intended for rehearsal to an audience), quite brought back and confirmed our ear-

liest enthusiasm. We are deliberately ready now to say that, in our opinion, Mr. Bryant's Iliad has naturalized, or will naturalize, the poem in the English tongue, if the poem is capable of the naturalization.

We close these volumes with a sentiment of homage for the genius that produced them which inspires a serious doubt. Did translation take the place of original composition? We should exclaim, "Now for the sweeter Odyssey!" but that the questions rise, Can Bryant afford it? Can American literature?

THE HISTORY OF

THE CHRISTIAN COMMISSION

AS A PART OF CHURCH HISTORY.[1]

A CANDIDATE appears for the rites of historic canonization. Silently, before that grave and silent council which is composed of all wise and generous opinions, and which holds perpetual session in every quarter of the civilized world, the United States Christian Commission stands to claim her place among the select and not numerous sainthood of great heroic devotions.

She would be secure of her palm, and she might move to her seat with undivided suffrages and amid universal applause. But the Christian Commission will not consent to sit down, a peer, confounded in the ranks of even so illustrious a peerage. The order of her claims is transcendent and peculiar. She refuses to be canonized a secular saint. She will not illustrate the calendar of the Sociologists, or the calendar of the Humanitarians. She avers that she was always baptized unto Christ. She demands to be registered in the calendar of the Catholic Church of the Nazarene.

We move to support this demand. We have examined the record, and we believe that the Christian Commission, its name and its fame, belongs to the Christian Church. It cost that Church nineteen centu-

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[1] Annals of the United States Christian Commission. By Rev. LEMUEL MOSS, Home Secretary to the Commission. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co. 1868.

ries of testimony, of patience, and of toil, not always without blood, to render such a history possible. Her travail for it has made her child too dear, for her now readily to relinquish it to the possessorship of another. For our part, we mean neither to let her title to it sleep, nor to let it be denied. The Christian Commission is Christian in nature as well as in name. We challenge for it, and we will vindicate for it, whoever is silent or whoever gainsays, a place of its own, and a conspicuous place, in that wide history of human redemption which, to more than one great mind of our race, has comprehended and interpreted all human history. This is the chief purpose of the present paper.

Many readers of the volume named in the note at the foot of the preceding page must be reminded with ourselves that the office of Old Mortality is a sadly needful one in this forgetful world. If there were any monuments of things foregone that could dispense with his heed, the monument of the United States Christian Commission might surely be one of them. But the lichens of forgetfulness love the stones of remembrance with very nearly an impartial affection, and the lines which commemorate goodness fill up as fast as the lines which commemorate crime.

We have read these annals, and it is as if the images and inscriptions which preserve an obscuring past had been traced again and deepened by a loving and faithful chisel. How the dimming legends of memory have cleared and brightened, that record the wonderful stories of our war for the Union, and of those gracious reliefs of love in ministry and sacrifice which commend it to history! Professor Moss has associated himself enduringly to the fame of deeds of which he was himself a part, in writing this pious and beautiful memorial volume. No future historian of the republic, to the end

of time, but must acknowledge his indebtedness to the compiler of these annals for a garnish of story, true and yet more exquisite far than the starriest fable of the Grecian or Roman heroic age.

The matter of the volume is judiciously distributed. Professor Moss gives us a good preface, furnishing what, to borrow a term from mechanic philosophy, might be called a *co-efficient* of appreciation for the use of the reader in judging of the author's work; there is a synopsis of the well-chosen titles of the chapters; a skilful summary, at the close, reviews and epitomizes the whole with suggestive reflections and comparisons; and, following all, comes a sufficiently copious index—so that the book might very well dispense with any further specific notice of its contents at our hands. But the interest of the subject is so absorbing, and its real importance is so great, that we feel compelled to disturb Professor Moss's crystallization of his materials, to produce a secondary one of our own, which shall at least be smaller in compass, if it is also necessarily somewhat less complete in comprehension.

Something, however, deserves to be said, by the way, of the publishers' part in this book. In a word, then, the volume, within the limits of its pretensions, is as close upon a work of art as a feat of mere manufacture well can be. The paper is perfect, the print is as fair as if each separate letter had enjoyed an engraver's pains upon it, the margin is just agreeably ample, the plates are as admirable in workmanship as they are valuable for the illustration they furnish, and, finally, the binder's success was such that the book has no favorite pages of its own to show you, while it manifests also that absolute indifference as to whether it lie open or shut in your hands, which we take to be the height of good-breeding in a book.

After the preface comes an introductory chapter entitled "A Glance Backward." This consists of an inquiry after the historical germs of the great charities of our civil war. The inquiry is conscientious and thorough. It goes back to the remotest historical times. Hebrew Scripture, Greek and Roman story, are sifted with all the heed and hope of a gulch miner looking for gold. Professor Moss seems to have corresponded judiciously in quest of helps and hints. One result is a letter from Professor Tayler Lewis, which is inserted in the text. It is written in that blended spirit of the thinker, the scholar, and the Christian, which constitutes the peculiar charm of everything that comes from Tayler Lewis's pen. President Anderson, of Rochester, cites for Professor Moss a remarkable instance of practical beneficence in war, on the part of some public-spirited merchants of Northern Germany during one of the Crusades, which, as early as the twelfth century, founded an order of knighthood, and finally gave a royal succession to Prussia. It is curious that a kingdom, which was destined to so warlike a history, should have had auguries about its beginning so exceptionally benign and pacific.

But, after all, this chapter is chiefly valuable for its negative results. Professor Moss was gleaning in a field where ill success was his best success. For the Christian Commission is without historic pedigree, in the ordinary sense of such an expression. Its origin has really no history but the history of the Christian Church. Christianity alone can explain it. There is a verse in "The Acts" which records the determination of some Syrian Christians to send relief to their suffering brethren in Judæa. That one verse has more seed in it, from which a Christian Commission might grow, than has all the seeming precedent that could be

sifted out of the whole world's literature, apart from scriptural suggestion.

The first chapter of the "Annals" proper is devoted to a survey of the "preliminary movements," which finally led to the formal organization of the Christian Commission. This is a most interesting and instructive review of that period of our national history which immediately preceded the war. We shall recur to this topic before we have done. For, in a just appreciation of the political and the religious conditions of those few intense moments of the national experience, will be found, we think, to lie the only true solution of that problem in history—the origin of the Christian Commission. Large place in the work of preparing the popular conscience and heart for the burden soon to be borne, is properly given to the Great Revival. This, however, we believe, was still more a symptom, than a discipline, of the religious life of the nation. The Great Revival was, in some sort, a lifting of the valve, to ease, for one moment, a pressure which the general conscience could not much longer endure. Just as Germany, till lately denied political channels for the natural and healthy flow of her gathering national life, had long been pouring herself abroad, in vast floods, without channel, of most unscholarly learning, and most unphilosophical metaphysics, and most unreligious theology,—so the moral earnestness of the American people, foaming up in heaps against the artificial barrier of compulsory silence, or at least of compulsory non-interference, with regard to human slavery in the South, was always ready to spring a little jet of relief for itself, whenever opportunity offered. The waters were continually multiplying, every wind was piling them higher, the bottom was heaving uneasily beneath them. When at last, with the concussion of the guns

at Fort Sumter, the dam itself gave way, it was a new Niagara bursting to the sea.

The various associations for the aid of the citizen soldiery in the field, which sprang up all over the country simultaneously with the setting out of the volunteers from home, present a phenomenon not different, perhaps, from that which has been presented in most of the popular wars of modern times—with this exception, however, which is worthy of note, that there was with us that superior facility of voluntary organization to which our free institutions had, for three generations, been training us. These associations corresponded with each other, and thus gradually drew more and more together. At last, and soon, in hands of rare earnestness and rare organizing skill, they became the world-renowned United States Sanitary Commission.

Thus far there was nothing really new, except that the scale of operations, proposed and begun, was generous beyond any precedent, and that a perfection of organization was realized, such as it is too easily conceded to be the exclusive prerogative of Cæsarism to furnish. A deep religious spirit worked in the conception, and in the administration, of this magnificent charity. But it did not propose to itself, or to the public, any ends except such as might, without injustice, be called material ones. Its president was the Rev. Dr. Bellows, a nobly earnest Unitarian minister, who, though probably to be reckoned with the extreme right wing of the widely extended array of his denomination, had nevertheless re-stated Christian doctrine[1] in forms that would have been far from acceptable to the straitest of the orthodox, and who, we suppose, if

[1] "Re-statements of Christian Doctrine." New York, 1860.

he were consulted, would choose the fortune and the fame, for now and for ever, of a Humanitarian, rather than those of an Evangelical, distinctively so called.

Such was the Sanitary Commission, and such was its head. And yet the Sanitary Commission did not feel ashamed of prayer, and prayer in the name of Jesus. An eminent layman—whom his fellow-citizens have singled out for high political honors, but whose chief glory, were he himself to choose it, we are sure would consist in being remembered as an Evangelical Christian, speaking from knowledge acquired in familiar coadjutorship with Dr. Bellows, in the administration of the Sanitary Commission, at the beginning—has assured us that the unction with which the Unitarian chairman would pray at their meetings "for the sake of Christ" was in no wise distinguishable, to the hearer, from Evangelical unction. "And would Dr. Bellows have said that what he was doing he was doing for Christ?" we asked. "He would," was the unhesitating reply. So much did outward fellowship, in labor that was Christ-like, avail to communicate to those who shared it in company what certainly was a kindred, and what appeared to be a Christ-like spirit. More deeply beholding eyes than ours are needful here to qualify for drawing a line of severe discrimination. It were quite too eager an uncharity to suggest the supposition that Dr. Bellows's broad views of religious doctrine would permit him, while his kind heart would impel him, to gratify his Evangelical brethren present, by using language capable of bearing two different interpretations — an orthodox one, dear to them, and a rationalistic one, true to him. No, the explanation rather is, that between those who loyally accept Christ for their Lord there may exist wide differences of speculative opinion as to the truth concerning his person,

without necessarily breaking that best mutual Christian communion—the communion of a common obedience to him. When Dr. Bellows confessed the rightful supreme mastership of Christ, that confession alone defined him a Christian in the real, if not in the technical, evangelical sense.

The gentleman to whom we just now alluded subsequently transferred his name, his munificence, and his personal co-operation to the Christian Commission. But to this day he remains magnanimously and honorably jealous for the good fame of the Sanitary Commission.

This is only one instance among many of the manner in which the furnace-heat of the hour fused the walls that had seemed to partition the indivisible kinship of all earnest souls. It is curious, too, to note how men of contrasted creeds struck hands, in mutual recognition of brotherhood, always on some platform of the Bible. Nor was it certain to be in the grace of the New Testament that they found themselves thus unexpectedly together; but, almost as likely, in the menace of the Old. The bale-fire of the rebellion threw a new light of interpretation on that Universal Book. Some who had sucked the paps of Peace until their enfeebled spiritual stomachs came to reject, for spurious, the too tonic scriptural inspirations of warlike times, now began to find them necessary food. Newspaper paragraphists were not slow to dramatize what was passing, in humorous narrations, true in spirit, if not in fact. Said one Unitarian minister, meeting another, about the time that the actual breaking-out of the war was fully exposing the enormous wickedness of its authors: "I never before felt so much like swearing." "Well," responded the second, "I felt as you do; but I turned to the Old Testament, and picked

out one of good old David's imprecatory Psalms. I read it twice aloud, and since then I have felt much better."

Probably, after all, the grim humorist himself never once thought how much more nearly the wars which established David's monarchy concerned the good of mankind, than did even the war which saved our American Union. This we may say simply in the light of undisputed history—just as, in the same light, we might say that the success of Greece against Persia preserved ancient civilization to the pagan world.

Zealous Christians, of the most pronounced Evangelical type, were among the earliest, the warmest, and the most munificent friends of the Sanitary Commission. These, of course, in their degree, infused into the operations of the society the devout religious spirit with which they labored themselves. Thus, if an agent of the Sanitary Commission, too much of the Master's mind to be content with meeting the merely material wants of those to whom he ministered, provided himself with medicine for the soul as well as with medicine for the body, he was not hindered, but rather bidden God-speed.

At the same time the Sanitary Commission held itself to the purposes which its name implied, aiming merely to supplement the provision made by the general Government for the material needs of the army. Noble, therefore, as was the Sanitary Commission, in thought and in fact, it yet left a craving of the church without its full satisfaction.

The Young Men's Christian Associations of the country were a kind of religious militia, or rather a volunteer force of religious minute-men, attached to the regular service of the church. These associations would almost seem to have been made ready by Providence, and disci-

plined beforehand, to play at this juncture a memorable part in the drama of ecclesiastical history. They comprised often the select youth and vigor of the churches, in those places where the churches are always youngest and most vigorous in appetite for religious enterprise, that is, in the larger towns and the cities. They only languished for want of work; and, to a man, their members greeted with delight the drum-beat that summoned them to the march and the fight of their unworldly war. Partly, no doubt, from that love of organization which so distinguishes our national character, but also, we must believe, partly under heavenly guidance towards an end then not yet revealed, the several associations of the country had corresponded with each other, and already effected a kind of confederation, which enabled them upon occasion to act as one body. An occasion, such as had no precedent in the past and such as will hardly have a parallel in the future, now arose.

A call was accordingly issued in due form, a call destined to be memorable, which summoned a national convention of the associations to assemble in New York, on Thursday, the fourteenth day of November, eighteen hundred and sixty-one. This representative body created a "Christian Commission," of twelve persons, to supervise a work of evangelical beneficence, proposed for the patriot armies of the republic. That day commenced the annals of the UNITED STATES CHRISTIAN COMMISSION.

A "Plan of Operations" was adopted, which, with an "Address," breathing, as did many of the similar documents issued by the Commission, a singular, an almost apostolic, dignity and fervor, was, after the lapse of an interval, submitted to the public. But, eager as was the haste of the church to be at work, some months

intervened before she recognized and accepted the Christian Commission, as the providentially appointed instrument for her use. It seems singular now, with its finished career in the retrospect, to be reminded how coldly at first Christian pastors and religious journals demeaned themselves toward a ministry of usefulness, which they were afterward to regard with such loyal affection, and to employ with such noble results. It shows, at least, that there was no narrow ambition among them, no factious rivalry, fostering a vainglorious wish to divide with the Sanitary Commission the honors which that organization was reaping, and which it was earning. The solemn earnest of the churches was too intense to show one instant's quarter to any make-believe. Wood, hay, stubble, could not stand the fury of that fire. The very quickest and sternest voice, of all the voices which challenged the Christian Commission at its setting forth, was the voice of the churches themselves. They cried halt, with an almost intolerant vehemence, and demanded to know with what credentials of its necessity it appeared. It was for this reason that the first months of its history were so bound in shallows and in miseries. But such an ordeal was perhaps needful, to afford conclusive evidence that its origin was not due to the "raw haste" of an officious ecclesiastical zeal, eager for demonstration, and unchastised by the wisdom of humility. The churches were more than willing to do their work, if they could, through the agencies that already existed. It cost them experience to be convinced that they could not. Meantime they were only too mistrustful of appearing to seek separation for the sake of enjoying their share of the public applause alone. Their spirit was the spirit of Paul—that of rejoicing if only the work of Christ were done.

The story is full of a singular interest, and it is told by Professor Moss not without some effect of a certain grave and gentle humor—how the Commission barely survived its infancy, almost no man even so much as for once dreaming of the stature to which its sudden and short maturity would grow. The vacating officer, who, six months and more after the Commission was founded, inventories its "assets" for his successor, with a condescension to details half whimsical, half pathetic, would have been incredulous had he been told that, within a year, the future incumbent of his office would help administer the disbursement of an annual revenue reckoned by hundreds of thousands of dollars!

Several things concurred to bring about the decisive turn which soon befell the fortune of the Christian Commission.

Foremost among these was probably the unexpected use which the enemies of religion began to make of the splendid success of the Sanitary Commission. These rubbed their hands in glee, and exclaimed at the demonstration that was in progress of the full sufficiency of materialism to satisfy every human need. Some artificer of phrases—a woman, we believe, the same "man-minded" woman that styled Kossuth, during that brilliant Hungarian comet's brief American perigee, "the Christ of the world's political redemption"—somebody, at any rate, furnished a convenient catchword. A noisy propagandism began for "the Gospel of Sanitary Science." This schismatic cry, on the part of infidels, brought thoughtful Christians to a stand—which was afterward not less firmly maintained, for having been at first reluctantly taken. They resolved on doing Christ's work in Christ's name. They thronged by thousands to the Christian Commission.

But there were other reasons why the Christian Com-

mission began to attract increased attention. The war was seen to be not quite so transient a phase, as at first was hoped, of the nation's experience. As the slow months dragged on, the Christian households which had been deprived, by enlistment, of the strong staff or the beautiful rod, the thinned churches, the decimated Christian Associations, became, through correspondence and the occasional visits interchanged between the home population and the armies, better acquainted with the appalling spiritual needs which camp-life engendered. This better acquaintance inflamed the hunger of the church to meet the growing emergency. And then, further, the attempts of the Commission, ill-sustained as they had been, were nevertheless so judiciously directed, that there arose a murmur of applause from the army which was not long in growing "full quire" throughout the community. The idea of sending unpaid volunteer "delegates," with a sphere of home influence clinging about them, directly to the camps and the battle-fields of the soldiers, to bring back again from their mission a store of incident with which to point their appeals to the audiences that thronged to hear from the lips of eye-witnesses all about their husbands, or their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their neighbors, in the war—this idea, we say, was an inspiration;—it was the life of the Commission.

The "Plan of Operations" did not emphasize this idea. Nor does it seem subsequently to have been the suggestion of any one person's prophetic sagacity. It had a spontaneous generation in the heat of actual work. It was the consummate result of experience; and yet it was only a new application of a plan as old as the gospel. It was a circuitous return to Christ's method of evangelizing men by personal contact of living souls. Thus do our most laborious results, when they prove

to be of any worth, chime with the easy anticipations of heavenly wisdom.

Another feature of the original scheme, very alluring in its promise, was found to be impracticable, and had to be abandoned. This was the proposal to undertake the delivery of packages directly to individual soldiers from the hands of their friends at home. Could this feat have been successfully accomplished it may yet fairly be questioned whether the total result would have been equally beneficent with that which attended the plan actually pursued. It would, no doubt, have satisfied a beautiful sentiment in the hearts of the home circle, and in the heart of the remembered absentee. But it would have been a subtly selfish satisfaction after all; whereas the fact that mothers, and sisters, and wives, all over the land, were compelled, with a sublime impersonal benevolence almost realizing some moralists' definition of virtue, to devote their tokens of love, so far as they were entrusted to the Commission, to the soldiers in general, and to greet for son, or brother, or husband, whatever volunteer might chance to receive their gift—this universally reciprocal consciousness dissolved the whole motherhood, and sisterhood, and wifehood of the nation into one multitudinous communion of wonderful kinship in sacrifice, and sympathy, and prayer. The same thing also occurred in the army; and nothing conceivable could have tended more to make one family of the entire people. In no unapt accommodation of the Saviour's words, every heart could have said: Whosoever belongs to this wide fellowship of love, the same is my brother, my sister, my mother.

It would be mistaken disparagement of the service to this nation, thus performed by the Christian Commission, to imagine that it possessed merely a senti-

mental value. True, its value was mainly sentimental at the first; but it did not exhaust itself and rest in sentiment. It went immediately on into a substantial moral value. It became a swift education of the national character, and radical as swift, and permanent as radical. For one hour's dissolving emotion, making the heart wax, does more to mould it into form forever than long years of dry attrition and indurating habit. And, during that commerce of mutual kindly ministration, which the Christian Commission carried to and fro, in endless circuits of issue and return, throughout the nation, there passed upon the general heart so many rapt transfigurements of feeling, and in so quick succession, that the electric thrills became a continuous current of transforming power. The war was one great galvanic battery, charged with an extremely various moral electricity to go shrewdly through and through the quivering quick of the nation; but no medium conducted so many gracious vital shocks to thrill it into goodness, as did the Christian Commission. For proof of this, we must ask our readers to open at random anywhere at those pages of the "Annals" which describe the effects produced at home and in the field by the labors of the Christian Commission. We do not envy the heart whose quickened beat sends no tear to the eye in passing under the exquisite touches of the beautiful story. Said one wounded soldier that had been tenderly cared for by the Commission's men, and was told that he had but five minutes to live—"Raise me to my knees that I may pray for the Christian Commission." The quarter-master stood watching the delegates at work among the wounded, and said to them, the tears rolling down his cheeks—"Is that what you do? I never heard of you—what can I do?—for you shall have everything you want." These pulses of heavenly

emotion travelled round the unbroken circuit of the nation, and lost nothing of their dissolving and remaking power on their way.[1] The telluric currents of electricity which, according to the conjecture of philosophers, girdle the globe with perpetual flow, are not more busy than were the streams of such intense and beautiful emotion traversing the great child-like heart of the nation. Can we be wrong in maintaining that this people was drawn to a nobler moral height, thus taught, by a most subtly persuasive tuition, to believe in other good than material good? How was it possible for those who had themselves seen such things, and felt such things, afterward to believe, whatever else might perish, that self-sacrificing love, vicarious devotion could ever? It is something to have faith in goodness and in its immortality—something not to

> dream of human love and truth
> As dying Nature's earth and lime.

No man is the same before and after he has obtained this faith. He overcomes the world afterwards, whom the world overcame before. And thus the sentiment, transformed into a moral attribute, goes yet farther on and is converted into a material gain. The better man is a better soldier too. For what fights battles and wins them, what storms forts and enters them, what charges batteries and captures them, what marches and does not tire, what fasts and does not faint, what watches and does not sleep, what suffers and does not shrink, what dies but does not surrender—this, after all, and notwithstanding the Gospel of Sanitary Science, is found to be, not muscle, and not stomach, but something higher than these—moral worth—will, faith, truth,

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[1] Page 254 of "Annals."

love, hope, "and all that makes a man." This truth is unconsciously confessed in the current term, applied to characterize the effective condition of an army—*morale*. No guess is likely to overstate the service of the Christian Commission in raising the *morale* of the army.

It is worthy of mention by way of illustrating the fidelity as well as the skill with which this vast trust was administered, that the books at the home office of the Commission showed where every package came from, what it contained, who sent it, when it was received, by whom it was delivered, to whom, when, and where. This consummate administration was due, in great measure, to one man, whose portrait[1] fitly forms the frontispiece of the volume—Mr. George H. Stuart, of Philadelphia. Mr. Stuart's personality is too broad and deep a mark upon the history of the Christian Commission, not to merit some further attention in an article like this. But first a further word or two on a topic suggested.

The partial account we have given of the actual method adopted by the Commission, in the field, will have served to show that the Plan of Operations, first put forth, was treated always as a merely tentative document. There was a full, fair degree of forecast exhibited in it; but it was not in the nature of things that it should avoid mistakes, both of inclusion and of omis-

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[1] We do not remember ever to have seen Mr. Stuart, and our impression from his portrait may be, unconsciously to ourselves, affected by our knowledge of his character. But certainly it seems almost an ideal picture of one born to be the inspiring and presiding genius of such an institution as the Christian Commission. So much gentle intensity, so much radiant manly sweetness, so much patience meekly glad over pain suffered and subdued, so much exercised self-control anointing to unsought leadership of others—do not often meet in session on any face of man. We willingly idealize; and we will thank no one to disenchant us.

sion. The point worthy of attention is this—the utter freedom from foolish persistency in a predetermined line of policy which marks the whole course of the Commission's executive management. There was boundless perseverance, but not a particle of obstinacy.[1]

In this wise heed of Providence on the part of the Christian Commission, this open ear to counsel, this ever uncommitted readiness to learn by experience, this willingness to tack but persistence toward its end—in these things, the course of the Christian Commission strikingly resembled that new statemanship of which Abraham Lincoln was, if not the originator, at least the first exemplar, with no second yet in prospect. Such a management makes the history of the Christian Commission an invaluable study. A fortune befell it which befalls few pioneers, in any field of human achievement—to show where the path was, and not where the path was not. The instructions of history are mostly negative instructions. They teach by warning rather than by example. But so long as the true path is one, and the wrong paths are numberless, it is only a partial satisfaction, tending to despondency as much as to hope, to know that this also, and this, is not the way. To this general law the Christian Commission happily is an exception. Its history is replete with fruitful precedents recommended by success. The Christians of the Old World will study it, in the spirit of pupils who may

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[1] This admirable self-control, this swiftness to hear, and slowness to wrath, which was not weakness, and which was, we believe, something yet wiser than accomplished worldly wisdom, had a fine illustration in the forbearance and silence maintained by the representatives of the Christian Commission during a brief period of imminent collision with the Sanitary Commission. There was infinite temptation then to be quarrelsome. But the Commission strongly forbore, and was not long in receiving the profit of its forbearance.

wish to put their lesson into practice. They will not fail to study it with profit. Such history is a greater than Philosophy—it is Providence, teaching by example.

It was a good augury for the Christian Commission, and a thing to be reckoned among the principal reasons for its entrance upon a new career of prosperity, when its "headquarters" were removed from New York to Philadelphia, the home of Mr. Stuart. It here enjoyed the advantage of ample accommodations for office and store, rent free, under the hospitality of its president. This was much at the first; for it had previously been a sojourner in tabernacles, with no income to be relied on for the payment of the smallest rent. But beyond any such advantage, calculable in money, it enjoyed the advantage of a personal oversight and personal impulsion, at the same time singularly regulative, and singularly vivifying. Yet further, and, men being human—a point perhaps scarcely less important—Mr. Stuart possessed, in an eminent degree, the often misused, and therefore naturally often-disparaged, art of popular impression. Himself such by character and by habit, as infallibly to be in exquisite chord with the tone of sentiment that would at any time prevail among the better and the religious class of average American minds, he was able always upon occasion to sound a key which would be sure to bring out a full chorus of popular assent and popular applause. Not ambitious, except perhaps of recognition as a restlessly active Christian, he had no ends but public ends to serve. Being such, and universally conceded to be such, it is easy to guess how, in the train of those advantages which belonged to his character, he would draw other advantages of an external sort, reinforcing his power with the public, and enabling him to influence, as well as reflect, the popular temper. For a

man like him would be an invaluable gnomon of the state of religious public opinion for the government to consult, and an invaluable instrument for the government to employ. The administration of President Lincoln had need to study all the currents of the unknown and perilous sea they were navigating; and they were wise enough to know that the religious convictions of the people drew, on the whole, the very widest and deepest and strongest current of them all. It was accordingly always with respectful, and even with grateful, heed that the administration hearkened, whenever a trustworthy representative voice spoke on behalf of the religious men of the nation. Such a voice by eminence was George H. Stuart's.

This explains what, to persons ignorant or unobservant of the peculiar relations that subsisted at the time between our government and the people, might well appear inexplicable—the phenomenon of a purely private citizen, the organ of a purely voluntary organization, enjoying a freedom of almost confidential access to the highest civil and military officials, during a crisis when every moment of every hour of every day was unspeakably precious to every one of them—an access such as would seem proper to be accorded only to members, for instance, of the National Legislature, who might be supposed to represent the national will. We know of nothing in history in all respects parallel. It reminds one of the familiar intercourse, described by Motley, between the patriotic, but often tumultuary, burghers of the Netherlands, and their brave burgomasters, during the Spanish invasion. But that belonged to a petty municipal relationship; while this was national, on a scale, too, of magnitude which dwarfs the imperial sway of Philip II. in comparison. The fact is, George H. Stuart, as Chairman of the Christian

Commission, did represent a constituency of American citizens—a constituency, to use no hyperbole, more numerous, more intelligent, more immovably loyal, and more self-sacrificing, than any constituency represented on the floor of either house of Congress. This the administration knew.

Making thrifty use, within wisely modest bounds, of his well-deserved opportunities, Mr. Stuart devised a method of signalizing the close of the Commission's first year by a series of anniversaries, in several important cities of the Union, under such auspices as should at once attract the public attention and secure the public confidence. Secretary Chase presided at the anniversary in Washington; and, by special vote of Congress, it was held in the Hall of the House of Representatives. This anniversary occurred, by no fortuitous coincidence probably, on a Sunday evening, and the evening of Washington's birthday. Lieutenant-General Winfield Scott presided at the anniversary in New York City.

These anniversary demonstrations recurred with each successive year of the Commission's history. The good they did was probably not unmixed with evil. But, however much they may have fed a morbid appetite in some for a cheap anniversary glory, and by reaction have discredited to a certain degree the motives of those who worked for the Commission, Mr. Stuart at least did not rest content with simply giving his cause the galvanized vitality of publicity. He exerted himself to gain the more substantial advantage of increased facilities of access to the armies through official authorization. This was not quite easy at first; and his efforts had to be made with great delicacy and caution. But his ultimate success was equal to his hopes.

The Christian Commission was now fairly launched.

If the cheers were faint while it hung in the ways, they were hearty enough when it was really afloat. Its voyage was prosperously completed without change of omens.

Space need not be wasted in attempting to settle points of precedence as among the various candidates for the credit of being first in time, or foremost in zeal, to attach themselves to the cause of the Christian Commission. Success in such an attempt could serve no true purpose of history. It would be at once difficult to achieve, and worthless when achieved. We are safest too in being chary of personal ascription. The work was singularly an impersonal work. It sprang from an inspiration too universal and too simultaneous to have proceeded principally from any single heart, or any siugle brain. God was its father, and the church its mother. At the same time the merit of George H. Stuart was so conspicuous, and, by a singular felicity, so free from envy, that we make no scruple in departing, in this one case, from our own rule of impersonal treatment, and writing his name in full across the forehead of the Christian Commission.

Some years ago, the Emperor of the French introduced into his legislature a project of law, ostensibly to reward a general with money for his services in the Cochin-China war. The deputies thought that the real object was to commence the founding of a new order of nobility, which should be attached by a relation of gratitude to the Emperor's person and blood, and should serve to buttress and adorn his throne. Quite unexpectedly, therefore, but quite consistently with the true Frenchman's inconsistent independence, they made a spirited stand against their master. They were still wrangling about the bill, when he intervened, with a petulant letter, and withdrew it. In the letter, con-

sciously or unconsciously borrowing a taunt from Tacitus, which, in losing something of its largeness, lost nothing of its mordant bitterness, in the imperial French, he told his deputies, in effect, that men usually appreciated great achievements in proportion to their own ability to produce them. Tacitus, with a grander, because not a personal, scorn, launched his sarcasm broadly against the age in which he lived, as, telling it of a better age, he said: *Adeo virtutes iisdem temporibus optime aestimantur, quibus facillime gignuntur.* We have taken the converse of this, and found a wholesome and kindly maxim in it, upon which we have practised in our allusions to Mr. Stuart. A generous atmosphere of appreciation must surely tend in some degree to foster the production of virtue.

It would of course be quite beyond the bounds of the practicable to furnish illustrations here that would adequately set forth the various character of the work accomplished by the Christian Commission. That work may conveniently be considered under a twofold division—I. Collection: II. Disbursement. The first part was home work,—the second part was field work. The first part included everything pertaining to the amassing of resources, of whatever sort; the second part included everything pertaining to the application of those resources to the object.

In the first place, the tributary area was divided into districts, for convenience and thoroughness of farming for revenue. These districts had each an auxiliary organization of its own, which reported to the central organization at Philadelphia, but which was locally independent and responsible. The districts were formed with a twofold reference: first, to their own geographical unity within themselves, and possession of a natural metropolis; and, secondly, to their respective vicinity

and relationship to corresponding portions of the field of operations. Each auxiliary collected and disbursed, according to its own discretion; but there were general features of method which gave a common character to all, and which enables the historian to use a common language respecting them.

It will be useful to mention a few of the almost innumerable expedients which were adopted for the collection of revenue.

In the first place, transportation of delegate and store was almost absolutely free of cost to the Commission—the railroad and steamboat companies, with a liberality not proverbial of such bodies, serving it gratuitously. The telegraph companies were similarly generous. These immunities lifted an immense burden from the budget of the Commission. They constituted in fact one of the most abundant, and most certain, sources of its revenue.

In the second place, those who rendered personal service for the Commission did so without pay. To this a small number of officers and clerks, who devoted their whole time to it, were the only exceptions. Estimated in money, the service thus rendered was worth a vast sum to the Commission. But it was worth infinitely more, in its moral effect, as being rendered in the spirit of love.

In the third place, public meetings were held, in which effective speakers, generally recent from experience in the field, and known to the audiences they addressed, would tell their moving stories of what the soldiers needed, and how the Commission supplied what they needed. If the immediate collections were not large, as however they often were, the community was thus kept in a softened, kindly, giving mood. And, in general, it may be said that the policy of the

Commission, whether fairly conscious of itself or not, was to take care that its fountains of supply in the benevolence of the public should always be full, rather than simply to draw every drop that it could, to be hoarded in a cistern of its own. It thus served the public that supplied it, as well as the public that it supplied. The popular heart was not impoverished of its generous impulses, but enriched in them instead. When the day of need came, the Commission was never disappointed of the means to meet it. The rock flowed again and again without sign of exhaustion, as often as it was smitten.

Accordingly, in the fourth place, recourse was never had to fairs, festivals, lotteries, rafflings, or other such expedients for getting people to give without knowing it. The Sanitary Commission resorted to these means, on a scale that would have been magnificent, if magnificence were separable here from high morality. But the Christian Commission never had any share in thus smiting the very heart of benevolence with sterility. It never pampered selfishness, covetousness, thriftlessness, gambling, greed—with the sham of charity baited with the hope of gain. They who do this, whatever their motives, whatever their purpose, whatever their success, have eaten their handful of seed and defeated the harvest. They have done worse. They have distilled the seed of a harvest into a draught to destroy.

From whatever point of view we regard the operations of the Christian Commission, we shall only find fresh occasion for wonder and delight at the many-sidedness—the orbicular completeness—of its beneficence. Its results were net results. There was almost no tare and tret to diminish the profits. Indeed this statement is itself but a negative half-truth. There was

not only little loss, but there was manifold prolific gain. An economy, and at the same time a certain opulent fructifying virtue, at every point, attended what it did, such as we are accustomed to attribute to the creative energy of God. The ease with which its revenue was collected resulted naturally from the self-evidencing genuineness of its work. In contrast with the painful way in which benevolent collections are often made, the Christian Commission's plan may be described as the sinking of an artesian shaft, instead of the working of a force-pump. The Commission's revenue flowed, as under some pressure of a force incorporated in the framework of the universe, from a spring coeval with the creation of the world. The tables of the Commission's agents standing in an Exchange, for example, would sometimes be heaped with the voluntary offerings of merchants to immense value, much faster than they could be counted. How many times blessed a work of benevolence like this must have been—must continue to be—for here eminently is a case in which the poet's claim on behalf of Virtue will have to be conceded,

> Give her the wages of going on, and not to die—

this no human sagacity will ever discover.

The topics which we have treated have been too tempting, or we have been too easily enticed. We approach that part of our subject of which the intrinsic narrative interest is greatest, and our shrinking space forewarns us to forbear our hand. We have put it fairly out of our power to represent the field work of the Commission justly here. We must remit our readers to the "Annals" themselves, if they desire to peruse a tale of ingenious love and unstinted devotion, rejoicing in romantic success such as we verily believe gladdens no other bloody page of human history. We

are not ashamed to confess that we have never yet once opened to read this part of the volume without getting blinded with tears. The sweet shocks that set the heart to pulsing, come so suddenly, and in such unconjectured ways, that it is quite impossible not to be womanly, if you are a man at all. It is touching enough to see the unpaid representatives of the Commission, on the battle-field and in the hospital, facing danger and disease, with that meek, slow, long bravery which is the hardest, that they may mitigate the bodily sufferings of the soldiers. It is more touching still, and gathers something of a true moral sublimity, when you see these men and women lavishly supplied with curious and costly ministries of relief, suggesting boundless resources behind them under self-imposed and eager tribute. But when you learn that the apparent work is merely incidental and ancillary to a work which does not appear; that these people are doing what you see purely for the sake of doing something farther on, which you cannot see; that they staunch the wound, allay the pain, appease the hunger, assuage the thirst, for a purpose beyond the beautiful deed; that, in fine, by every art of quick inventive love, they strive to sphere the sufferer round, amid the horrible realities of war, with the dear illusion of home again and mother's-care, conjuring with whispered spells of power in "household talk and phrases of the hearth,"—all not for duty, and not for humanity, however sensitively susceptible to both of these, as certainly not for reward; but for paramount personal loyalty to a NAME to them above every name,—when you know, we say, that, without exception, *every one* of all this multitude of ministrant men and women would have told you, "The love of Christ constrains me,"—the effect of pathetic moral sublimity, to any wholesome human heart,

is simply overpowering. It requires the last effort of literary virtue to refrain from trying to set a few idyls, at least, selected from the great panorama, before the readers of this paper. But we have set to ourselves a task which forbids the indulgence.

The question which we began by proposing—What is the place of the Christian Commission in history?—ostensibly postponed thus far, has really been under implicit discussion throughout the article. We intend to devote some farther and more specific attention to it. But first we interpose two or three reflections by the way.

It is truly curious, to the thoughtful student of that most prolific period of our national history—the years of the Civil War—truly curious to observe with what ingenious economy Providence devised to use every resource of the country. For instance, many of the men most active, and most nobly and most usefully active, in the operations of the Christian Commission, were such in natural disposition and in their habits of life that without the peculiar vent for their enthusiasm, which this great engine of practical beneficence and of popular impression afforded, their elastic and mercurial vitality would have been lost to every purpose of public advantage for the war. Solid business men, and men of a quiet, unostentatious turn of mind, would sometimes needlessly shrug their shoulders, when this or that name, representative of the Christian Commission, was mentioned in their presence—as if it suggested sounding brass and tinkling cymbal, rather than qualities of genuine and substantial worth. The truth is, that these censors of their fellows were probably right—in part; but it is certain that they were also wrong—in still greater part. Perhaps it was the weakness of some to take an undue delight in the

functions of office, and in rounds of anniversary applause. But then, to discount a hundred per centum from either the merit, or the value, of their services to country and humanity, on account of such a foible, would be to err in judgment, by having first erred in heart. The husbandry of Providence is always wise. These men knew, by an instinct deeper than reasoning, that emotion is a powerful spring of human conduct, as much as is conviction. It is but fair to confess, that among the various multitude of those who contributed to the common cause of the republic, and perhaps too of Christianity, during the war, the *emotionists* also were a tribe by no means to be despised. If a traffic in human emotion may be plied, with no appeal to passions less generous than pity and love, who shall say that it works any harm? But is there not a pulse of something that goes deeper than mere sentiment, in such an incident as this?—we quote a foot-note from p. 527 of the volume before us:—

"A writer in 'The Sunday-School Times,' for August 27, 1863, tells how the money was raised at Saratoga: The question arose, How shall we get at these people and gain a hearing? Mr. Stuart said, 'The only time when they are all together is at the dinner table. I will make a speech of just one minute at the dinner.' 'But in the infinite clatter of plates, the noise of waiters running to and fro, the clamor of conversation, and the general melee of a thousand hungry people scrambling for their dinner, you cannot get a hearing. It is impossible.' 'Let me try.' 'Agreed.' So when dinner had advanced about one-third of its course, a concerted noise of rapping was heard in different parts of the room, and instantly, over all the din, a clarion voice was heard uttering these words: '*I have news from Charles-*

ton!' Had a ball from one of Gilmore's 200-pound Parrotters struck the house, the effect could not have been more instantaneous. Every knife and fork dropped; every eye was turned to the speaker. The falling of a pin could have been almost heard. With a tender solemnity of manner that showed how his whole soul was wound up in the cause, and at the same time with a smile of indescribable sweetness that begged and gained in advance forgiveness for the petty ruse which had been practised, he said: 'I have a despatch from the commanding officer at Hilton Head, saying, "*For God's sake, send us ice for our wounded soldiers!*" Will the boarders at Saratoga respond?' 'We will! *we will!* WE WILL!' was shouted from every part of the immense hall. And they did. In less than twenty-four hours a purse of $3,200 was made up and the ice was soon on its way from Boston."

We have already abundantly shown how much good business thrift there was underlying all this tact for moving appeal.

Another reflection suggested by the perusal of these "Annals" is, that the Christian Commission proved to be, in some degree, like that Lord whom it aimed to imitate, a touchstone for the revelation of individual character. We seem to ourselves to discover even a singular closeness of parallel here. Of those who were brought into contact with the Christian Commission, a few recognized it in its true transcendent character, and were irresistibly attracted to the discipleship of its beautiful beneficence; more felt a charm in it, which after all they admired and lauded but did not obey; some were simply insensible that there was anything among them incarnate from heaven; while here and there a man would pronounce sentence upon himself,

with a rigor of justice against which he could make no complaint, by assuming an attitude of unfriendliness toward it. We intend no invidious tenacity of memory against a high-spirited and chivalrous, if also somewhat erratic and irascible man, when we name General Sherman as an illustration of our meaning. That officer's curt, scornful, perhaps Napoleonic message in reply to the Commission's application for leave to accompany his army on their famous march to the sea —to the effect that gunpowder and oats were all that his forces required—is cited in the "Annals," with a certain Rhadamanthine severity of gentleness, in the manner of remarking upon it, which seems to us—not to deny it higher praise—altogether admirable as a specimen of rhetorical forbearance. General Sherman is evidently himself awkwardly conscious of the past, when, in compliance with a formal request, such as was made to most of the prominent generals at the close of the war, he puts on record his opinion of the Commission's work. He manifestly wishes to accord it a generous measure of unqualified praise. But his memory jogs his desire, and he is content to save himself with a clause.

The question recurs—a question which every mind accustomed to classify facts must ask—What place in general history belongs to the Christian Commission? The topic is one which demands discussion. In form, it is merely a problem of the philosophy of history. In essence, it is the persistent riddle of that Sphinx-Proteus, who confronts to vex a scornful but uneasy age, whichever way it turns its eyes toward the girdling horizon, with the reiterant ironical doubt—Is there *not* something SUPERNATURAL in the universe? It may startle, or it may amuse, but we raise the inquiry: Was the Christian Commission a mere accessory and

accident of our civil war; or, to the highest and widest view, was the civil war itself even a tragic scaffolding of history, on which the church of Christ should display a grace of goodness descended from heaven? What if it shall eventually appear that the Christian Commission, and not the war, continued our share, as a nation, in human history? Some nineteen centuries ago, an obscure young man in Judæa predicted of certain transcendent and extremely unmaterialistic doctrines which he was inculcating, that they would gradually found a kingdom of heaven, as he called it, destined to cover the earth. It was but a few years after, that the greatest of Latin historians paused one haughty instant, amid the legionary march of those clanging mail-clad periods, in which he described the subjugation of provinces, the triumphs of generals, the decrees of senates, the glory and the shame of emperors, to despatch his notice of the Christian religion, in a single line of Roman disdain. Tacitus represented the culture of his times more brilliantly than Jesus. Tacitus has even been elected, we believe, with unanimous suffrages to a kind of honorary posthumous membership in their guild, by the modern critical school of philosophical historians: while Jesus is of late dandled on their knees, as a grown-up Galilæan infant, proper to be admired for his pretty provincial prattle, and his half-arch, half-innocent rustic little ways, but by no means ever to be admitted to his majority, as a citizen in the great republic of enlightened and emancipated thought. And yet, in the presence of nineteen finished Christian centuries, it is not presumptuous to ask: Was Tacitus, or was Jesus, better master of the true philosophy of history? The polished Epicureans of a sentenced age thought the Judæan had at most but stirred a transient eddy on the outer edge of the great

stream of Roman history. Are their modern disciples surer to be right, who esteem that same meddlesome Judæan's share in our civil war only the casual accompaniment of a martial stride in the mighty march of Western civilization?

Here was a beneficence, in money and in personal service, of a kind that never yet was purchased with money, surpassing, in mere material volume, any great voluntary act of popular devotion, continued through a series of years, that has relieved the selfish monotony of history, certainly since the Crusades. We make no exception of the Sanitary Commission; for that too had the breath of its life from the heart of the Crucified. Some might indeed, assuming to speak on its part, deny him; but he cannot deny himself. The very mention of the Crusades, as in any manner a parallel to the Christian Commission, instantly suggests the heaven-wide contrast that distinguishes the two. Fanaticism will account for the Crusades. But not the most fatuous philosophy of history, we presume, would claim to discover any trace of fanaticism among the motives, whatever they were, that conspired to create and sustain the Christian Commission. There was no glut of greed, and no glut of revenge, in what the Christian Commission proposed to its faithful. Or, if any, then it was glut of a greed not common and not natural to men—a greed for self-sacrifice; and glut of a revenge not sweet save to disciplined tastes—the revenge of forgiveness and vicarious love.

What then was the motive which underlay the Christian Commission? Our answer is ready, and it is short: it was a SUPERNATURAL love of Christ. But, of course, it would not be difficult for a new Gibbon, in a distant age, to fill a spacious chapter of candid historic disquisition with a modestly tentative list of *secondary*

motives, which, as he would insinuate, may have reinforced and supplemented the chief—sufficient in number and in specious appearance to convince himself, and such others with him as needed no convincing, that the case of the Christian Commission, indeed extraordinary, was a case, however, merely of the extraordinary concurrence of ordinary causes. By way of presenting this negative critical side of the subject, we have a mind to try our hand for a moment at the construction of a piece of philosophical history. The first step is to deprive the subject of life. No action of history can be treated philosophically until life is perfectly extinct. Having carefully drawn out the life-blood, you may experiment freely on your corpse. It is very satisfactory to the rational mind, by the injection of fluids scientifically prepared in the laboratory of critical thought, to produce those twistings and twitches with which galvanism travesties vitality. This, in short, is philosophical history. We begin:

We are now to consider the surprising and pleasing phenomenon of the Christian Commission. Setting aside, as extra-rational, the motive which explained that phenomenon to an uncritical age, we may properly inquire for some of those auxiliary natural motives, alone worthy of discussion in a history written according to the canons of positive science, that coöperated to contribute this beautiful by-play of benevolence to the horrid tragedy of the great Civil War.

I. In the first place, to begin with the most obvious, and perhaps not the least considerable, of these appreciable motives, we may safely reckon the operation of the familiar law of *human sympathy*. The contrivers of the Christian Commission wisely [the new Gibbon might say "shrewdly"] made novel use of an old

resource,—a resource which, in fact, had always existed in human nature. [By the time he writes, tables of statistics may have shown the mathematical laws and conditions under which this, at present, somewhat uncertain and capricious force performs its functions,—possibly even at what recurrent intervals it may confidently be expected to produce great historic phenomena like the Christian Commission.] It was quite to have been anticipated, that an age of the world in which social science had just begun to walk abreast of physical science—the two learning to keep step to the same high rhythm—should witness precisely such a development. The physicists, for half a century, had been out on the boundless steppes of space, lassoing the wild powers of the world of matter, and harnessing them to the car of human progress. It was but natural that now the sociologists should begin to tame and use the yet undisciplined powers of the world of mind. Civilization had touched a tidemark, in the country and the age, which, by every calculation of the gospel of Materialism, should indeed have made war itself impossible. In default of that, the very least that could be admitted, as satisfying the logic of philosophical history, was that some new and beautiful amenity of war should be exhibited. Had not humanity been steadily moving in this direction for nineteen centuries [the naming of that period might, but it would not, give the historian pause]? It was a thing of course that the next step should be just this. It might have been predicted — probably would have been, had social science received more attention, or had Buckle's "History of Civilization" been commenced a generation earlier than it was.

II. But, in the second place, in addition to the less

regular and trustworthy motive of sympathy, there was the great fact of *humanitarianism*—daughter, or mother, of social science, doubtful which—a broad seal across the forehead of that age. The Christian Commission was a movement of humanitarianism—by no means unique, for it was merely one of many. There was a whole sisterhood of similar philanthropic agencies, that made no sanctimonious pretensions, either, to being anything more than generous ministries of material aid. The Sanitary Commission surpassed the Christian Commission in the dimensions of its work. The title "Christian" was a popular catch-word, cunningly, or perhaps honestly, adopted to utilize the influence which a Galilæan name had not yet ceased to wield over the feebler and less enlightened minds of the American community. Practically the Christian Commission made the same kind of appeals as did the Sanitary Commission, and assessed its revenues upon the same resources. They were both representative of the progress of the age—the Sanitary Commission representing its van, and the Christian Commission its rear.

III. And then, in the third place, distinct from mere sympathy, and distinct from the laws of scientific philanthropy, the *patriotism* of the nation was eager for every vent that could offer, and it seized upon the Christian Commission as promising a practical means of increasing the effectiveness of the forces under arms. It was simply a new form of what had been done, in some form, in every age and in every country, during a popular war. The non-combatant population would of course exert themselves inventively at home, to help their brethren in the field. That there should be a contrivance for communicating directly and personally with the troops in camp or on the march, was note-

worthy, perhaps, but hardly surprising, in an age which saw armies spinning spider-webs of telegraph behind them, as fast as they moved over flood, and morass, and mountain—and building roads, less durable, but more wonderful, than those majestic highways which slowly crept, with the pace of advancing Roman dominion, across the solitudes of Europe. It was a select moment of the national life. It was, for this nation, a crisis in that struggle which every historic nation is necessitated to accept as the universal and inevitable condition of continued existence. The enterprising naturalists of that day had already discovered how the ranks of animated nature were embroiled in a perpetual competition, individual with individual, and species with species, straining abreast of each other in a breathless race for the prize of life. Thus, too, the nations of the earth were contending together, under the impending gaze of history, to decide which of them should perish and which should survive. The American people had now their choice, to conquer or to disappear. They conquered, but they conquered only because their patriotism—which is the romantic name, that it would be unphilosophical not to indulge, while it may chance still to remain, for a season, dear to men—because their patriotism, the romantic metaphor for their desire of life, was equal to their need. But their patriotism would not have been equal to their need if it had not gathered head enough to flow a fountain wherever a shaft was sunk for supply. The Christian Commission filled its urn because there was water sufficient to satisfy every comer. That which explained the military and the financial, explained also the philanthropic, achievements of the people. Their desire was equal to their need, and their strength was equal to their desire.

IV. And, finally, [the fresh and exuberant genius of our future Gibbon would suggest], whatever in the phenomenon of the Christian Commission the motives already adduced might fail to explain, there would yet be no need of resort to the *supernatural* motive until those other copious springs of human action were exhausted, the sentiments of personal and of national pride. The managers of the Christian Commission [he would say] used every artifice of holy guile, to ply these noble weaknesses of men for the benefit of their society's exchequer. Untold thousands of dollars must thus have swollen the revenues of the Commission, which were levied on the givers under virtual menace of personal ignominy if they were withheld. Again, no American but was sedulously instructed that his dollar or his thousands, contributed to the funds of this charity, helped to make his country a spectacle of wonder to the world and to posterity. Few minds among the multitude were steady enough to resist the pleasing intoxication of the thought that they too might share in this apotheosis of the nation. [Our philosophical historian would almost grow warm with an enthusiasm not philosophical, in enlarging upon this theme. He would fetch precedents from far.] Greek history and Roman history went for nothing if they did not prove that human nature was capable of doing and of suffering whatever fate could propose that was dreadful and not impossible, in the desire of deathless personal fame; or, in default of that, in the devouring love of at least a pathetic immortality in a country which should survive, by the self-sacrifice of her children—that is to say, stating it coolly, under the influence of the two sentiments of personal and of national pride.

But enough of this. No one that has not tried it

can imagine how easy it is to write amateur philosophical history. The whole secret lies in one thing. It is a process of desiccation. You go into the living flower-garden of human events. You neatly cut the plants from their roots, but leave them standing, and extract their juices. They are next allowed to wilt and to dry. You then label them at your pleasure. Your result is philosophical history. This is the amateur method. To be able to blast a whole garden of flowers at once, with your breath, is a higher endowment. That is to possess a genius for philosophical history. With this, if you live long enough, or, to express it scientifically, if isothermal lines, mean temperatures, vital averages, and principles of selection, do not cipher you out of the calculus too soon, you may hope to make one Sahara of all human history. For there are no great deeds, no high hopes, no pure motives, no generous devotions, springing in any sheltered oasis of the world's wide secular wilderness, that can stand the sirocco breath of this materialistic incredulity, and this Mephistophelian insincerity. One full expiration from that heart of dust and fire, and the blight is complete. An analogous achievement has been described in memorable words: *Ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant.* They make a desert and name it philosophical history.

In truth, it would be about as philosophical to lose sight of the chief motive that originated and sustained the Christian Commission, and occupy ourselves with the secondary and parasitic motives which that drew in its wake, as it would be for a military observer to overlook the real army, and only take account of sutlers and scavengers, and the nameless rout, which compose its mercenary following. No doubt those minor motives worked in the Christian Commission, and no

doubt, too, if those had been all that worked, there never would have been a Christian Commission to philosophize about. The severest test that an army undergoes, is to be beset by large numbers of non-combatant hangers-on, a sordid and venal horde seated watchfully on its haunches by the camp, or dogging every movement on the march. It is proof supreme of discipline and virtue, if then its organization and effectiveness maintain themselves unimpaired. And so we say, the fact that these lower motives swarmed upon the Christian Commission like parasites, and did not devour their parent after the manner of their kind—this of itself is sufficient demonstration that there was a deeper motive underneath the work, capable of ministering to it the power of an endless life.

No, not thus easily is the Christian Commission to be relegated to the obscurity of uniformity with commonplace history. It was an extraordinary movement, and it was due to an extraordinary motive. It was the birth of a travail which critical philosophy by itself will strive in vain to comprehend. To comprehend it, asks, besides, intelligent moral sympathy with the glad spirit of sacrifice which first delivered it to the welcome of its immortal renown. The history itself is the sufficient defence of the history.

Livy has an intense and splendid line in his romantic narrative, describing the sentiments and emotions with which the brothers Horatii went into their memorable fight with the brothers Curiatii, to decide the fate of nascent Rome. The imagination of the historian kindles into incandescence, with a poet's pleasure and a Roman's pride in the great traditions of his forefathers, and this line darts from it like a sudden vivid ray from a calcium light, cleaving a pathway to the view through the thick legendary gloom. Those three

brothers move, revealed in it, staggering under the weight of history which they bore into battle on their shoulders, but strengthened to bear it by the orbed visions of the future which rolled before their eyes. Words cease to be description, and become exhibition. You read no longer—you behold.

A lightning-flash of language such as this, dashed down upon the great arena where our nation closed in mortal combat with rebellion, better than any elaborate argument would show how the Christian Commission was produced. It would exhibit the nation actuated by purposes and motives of an order far beyond the power of the brilliant pagan historian, suckled in a Christless creed, to attribute to those three mythic champions of Rome. It would exhibit the nation lifted sheer out of the ordinary plane of human feeling into a sphere of sublime and holy exaltation, rapt as one soul together into a religious ecstasy, nobly beside itself with an inspired moral rage. The tense temper of the hour was beyond description, beyond conception; beyond memory, to those who shared it, it never can be.

A period of insupportable suspense and shame had intervened, while the moribund administration of Mr. Buchanan was dying its death. It seemed an immortality of dying. One remembers it as he remembers an evil dream. The most hopeful of us well-nigh began to despair of the republic. We saw so much apparent apathy that we feared the heroic spirit had departed. The traditions of the Colonial times and of the Revolution seemed a spent spell. The Union and the Constitution, the venerable fame of Washington, the memory of the Fathers — these watch-words, once so electric, now fell dead on the nation's ear.

The nation was perishing with dry rot. Peace had got to the secret of our life. We had practised at al-

chemy so long that we were turning into gold. Men began to doubt whether there was any American nation. We were sunk in coma. We felt like a man in nightmare. We saw our danger. We felt our fall. We knew the abyss was bottomless; but we could not stir hand or foot. We could not even draw the blanket over our heads and perish bravely, like the Indian going over Niagara Falls. We stared at each other stupidly, and were perishing helplessly. It was dreadful.

Men said to themselves: Perhaps the Fathers were wrong. Perhaps patriotism is an impossible virtue here. It may be that our territory is too large to be embraced in that fond and beautiful affection which we call love of country. It may be that so vast an expanse of continent, with such diversities of climate, of industry, of production, has interests too various for the comprehension and care of a single government. We may have overrated the elasticity and adaptedness of our institutions. The statesmanship of all the world may have gone wrong in agreeing to call our federal constitution the masterpiece of legislative wisdom. Or even it may be we have over-estimated our own capacity for self-government. Our widely-diffused intelligence, our high-toned morality, our respect for law, our reverence for religion—these necessary qualifications for the right enjoyment of freedom may have existed in our fond imaginations rather than in reality. Perhaps we are an age too soon. Our experiment, it may be, must fail, for the benefit of another to follow. Alas, how many experiments for this weary world, heart-sick with deferred hope, before the dream of a free government and a happy people shall be realized?

Such was the extremity. Did this syncope mean death? The nation waited with longing to have the

stupor shaken off. Our danger seemed our opportunity. If only we might revive with the consciousness of it! The best government on earth was in the throe of its fate. We were all of us suddenly in the trough of the sea. We found ourselves caught in a solemn crisis of history.

Two great cycles of human progress hung and hinged on us. The greatest of the world's sixty centuries in the past—a greater century to come—wavered on the balance of our decision. We had been living to ourselves. That was past. We might now begin to live for others. We might live for our fathers and for our children. Our fathers beckoned toward us, out of the past, with the awful port of a dead and immortal generation. Our children hovered on the border of the future, and we heard their voices before us, like the din of the near unseen sea. Our fathers asked us, Will you transmit what we transmitted? Our children asked, Will you break the vase, or reach it to our hands? There was a universal, inarticulate desire, forbidden yet to speak, longing to answer backward and forward. It longed to say, Fathers, we will be true children!—Children, we will be true fathers! It longed to answer upward, O God, Amen!

Between such a past and such a future, the present was annihilated—crushed like a ship between Arctic icebergs. Generous hearts thanked God for the opportunity of self-sacrifice. They only prayed to be raised to the level of that high anointing. We were kings—might God give us the kingly chrism! We were priests—might God pour out on our heads the oil of consecration!

The gathered stress of all human progress for six thousand years was pressing on us. We could send it on or turn it back. Christianity had created the issue

that seemed now about to be fought. Christians could not therefore but be patriots. As such, they were ready with their answer to the summons of the crisis. They were willing to accept it as the work, not of a few, but of all—not of a year, but of an age,—for the whole living generation. It would be glory enough for our generation, if it should give no further account of itself to posterity than to have saved this government. It would be our share of history to have rescued history. Let go the greed of gain—this was the voice of the church—let go the greed of gain, the lust of power, the chase of pleasure, the race for fame; let agriculture, manufactures, commerce,—let literature, science, art,—let thought, speech, deed, be offered, a holocaust, on the altar of this sacrifice. It may be we shall not save the Union. We shall, at least, have saved the government. We shall put such a sanction on the Constitution, by deserved chastisement of rebellion, that henceforth it shall never be holiday business for a disaffected State to say "Good morning," and step out of the Union. This generation can afford to give its lease of life and labor for that. This generation can afford to shed its blood, like water, for the sake of laying a sanction of blood all over the sacred ark of the Constitution. Martyr blood may never again seal a nobler testimony, or sanctify a richer treasure. A less offering may suffice. But if not—one cry went up—then let this whole generation rise, twenty million strong, and take the awful sacrament. Lift up your hands,—it said,—ye chosen, and swear! Swear, that till it be accomplished for this you live! Swear, that life has no other meaning for you, that you eat, and sleep, and breathe, for no other purpose—till your country shall have received in your prayers, your treasure, and your blood, the baptism of its immortality!

Such was the spirit that slept, as powder sleeps, in the bosom of the American Church. It waited only for the fire's touch, and waited not long.

The night of the fourteenth of April, eighteen hundred and sixty one, was stormy with rain. But the throngs of excited men who filled the streets of our towns and cities, did not know it. "Fort Sumter" was the watchword that flew from lip to lip. Through the dark and through the rain, "Fort Sumter" was the watchword that fled shuddering on the wings of the lightning from one end of the country to the other. Twenty millions of men talked of Fort Sumter at the self-same moment.

It was telegraphed that the Federal flag on that fortress had been struck to traitors. Probably never before, since the world began, did an equal number of human beings thrill with so sudden and so intense an excitement. The electric spark which sped that news ran through every American heart. The land was ablaze. From Maine to Florida, from the Atlantic to the Pacific, was one broad sheet of flame that rain could not extinguish. All men felt that this kind would not go out but in a baptism of blood.

It was all the work of a moment. The old watchwords of the Republic, the Union Flag, the Stars and Stripes, the Star-spangled Banner—sacred emblems, long profaned, of so much that was deathless—these suddenly had a meaning again. The electricity came back into them. The nation felt the thrill. We woke from the dead, and leapt into resurrection. Thanks for the trumpet that roused us, though it was even the trumpet of war.

No wise Christian patriot now could wish to fan the flame which had begun to rage. It did not need to be fanned. It wrapped the globe and kindled to the sky

already. But while there was no Christian reason for heightening the excitement, there was every Christian reason for deepening it. Those might, who would, build bonfires. Christians preferred to blow their breath on the red heart of the anthracite. They wanted to see the tinder-flash of patriotism fixed in the anthracite glow of religion. It takes long to ignite a Pennsylvania coal-mine; but once ignited, it burns centrally and inextinguishably. Christians wanted to see an American patriotism of that sort. They wanted to see it find its fuel in religion, among the measures and strata of eternity.

There was no Christian way of dealing with such a crisis, but dealing with it calmly. Calmness was the Christian watchword for that precipitate hour. Not the calmness of indifference, but the calmness of settled resolve. Not the calmness of inaction, but the calmness of a movement so regular and so resistless that it should seem to be rest, like the circuit of our planet through space. Such a calmness as Luther felt, when he first saluted his mission at the Diet of Worms. It is always most important to be calm at just those great moments when it is most difficult to be calm. Danger calmed Luther that day. His calmness saved him. The calmness for this nation, therefore, was that calmness which a man feels when he has taken his purpose. Say, rather, that calmness which a Christian feels when he has knelt at the Throne, and God has given him his duty.

It was manifestly impossible for any but Christians to drink fully into the spirit of an occasion like this. It became, therefore, the solemn duty of the Church to lead the generation. It was not a time for relaxing the energies of the Church; it was a time for redoubling them. It was not a time for depressing the standard

of Christian aspiration; it was a time for raising it. The Hebrew Moses was not fitted to lead the great exodus of Israel, but by frequent interviews with God. He had to go up into the mount to receive his strength and his instructions. We, as Christians, were appointed a Moses, to conduct our generation. We, too, needed to ascend above the plain of the multitude. Our speculation must be higher and wider. We were to impress a character upon this struggle. It would go down to the future, bearing our superscription. It lay in our power, by the grace of God, to instruct mankind by an unparalleled spectacle. We could astonish all nations by showing them a *war*, on our part, *without the demoralization of war.*

The influence of Christianity was already obvious enough. Notwithstanding such a surge of excitement as never swept over a people before, all was, as yet, restrained by order and law. Impatient the North had been, but its impatience had only shown the strength of its obedience. The very bed of the sea had been upheaved beneath, but the swell of the waves had still regarded the shore. The swelling heart of the North had heard and heeded the decree of law, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further. It was the perfection of civilization. Let us say boldly, and more truly, it was the triumph of Christianity.

But there were not wanting omens of danger. An able and influential daily newspaper even uttered threats of sedition. It was, perhaps, the outcry of patriotism, untaught and unrestrained by religion. It may have portended what would have occurred in a less Christianized nation. Wise men foresaw that such a spirit, if it prevailed, would be the worst defeat of our cause. Such a spirit would be the only possible defeat of our cause. Our victory must be a moral victory, or

victory itself would be defeat. On the Church of Christ rested the responsibility of speaking the calming word. No other voice than hers, speaking in the name of her Lord, could pronounce effectually the mandate, "Peace, be still." Oh, what a longing invaded and usurped the mother-heart of the Church, to see her children now walk worthy of the vocation with which they were called. The glorious occasion must not pass by unused. Such an opportunity of signalizing, on a colossal national scale, the power of Christianity, does not occur once in a thousand years. *War, without the demoralization of war.* It would justify our cause more splendidly than success. It would be better to fail thus, than to succeed otherwise. A defeat, so suffered, would be a more signal vindication, than victory less worthily won. Let the North see to it. Let the Church see to it. Let us see to it. Let me see to it.

It was in just such a set, solemn, awful sense of universal and individual responsibility, that the Christian Commission originated. It would be beggarly failure to comprehend the truth ourselves, or craven abandonment of it at the challenge of her foes, were we to commute the claim of the Church by the abatement of even one tittle from this. The Church had an ear to hear the call of the great occasion. She recognized in it the voice of her Lord. He seemed to say, Take care that my cause suffer no detriment in the war. She organized her obedient reply, and named it THE CHRISTIAN COMMISSION.

THE CHARACTER AND THE LITERARY INFLUENCE OF ERASMUS.

WE do not now remember to have met with the suggestion anywhere, but it has frequently occurred to us that, of all the ancients who have become historic, Cicero was best prepared to be at home in modern civilization. Such was the breadth of his culture, and such the cosmopolitan catholicity of his appreciation, that, to our fancy, it involves but little incongruity to think of the polite and philosophic Roman re-nascent, as a fully naturalized citizen of our times. We do not imagine it would occasion more than perhaps a slight involuntary start, to step out, shortly after reading some of his epistles, and recognize the writer, *redivivus* with the air and habit of a thorough-bred "modern gentleman of stateliest port," quietly purchasing a ticket at a railway station, or dispatching a message by Morse's Telegraph; and we seriously insist the anachronism would not seem so very flagrant, to light upon a paragraph in the papers some morning, announcing that "Hon. M. T. Cicero had already signified his willingness, and might therefore be expected, to address his fellow-citizens, at such or such a time and place, on the great questions now pending before the country."

A certain similar facility of accommodation to differ-

ent states of society it is natural to conceive as belonging to the character of Erasmus. One does not, however, derive it from a similar origin. In the case of the Roman your impression arises from that large-minded power of anticipating future forms of civilization, yet more nobly endowed, which you naturally attribute to him, by inference from the generous though eclectic sympathy he certainly did extend to all the varieties with which he was acquainted. In the case of the Dutchman, on the other hand, you simply feel that there is no reason why this man should be unfit for any order of things. His capacity of versatile adaptation does not seem to you positive, like Cicero's, but negative — rather without repulsions than, like the other's, instinct with attractions. You do not see in him, as in Tully, any of that rare mental compass which, embracing all countries and ages in its equal regard, suggests at once the unity of our race and our immortality, and marks out its possessor as intended "not for a day, but for all time;" nor is there any breathing of the child-like curiosity and wise docility proper to comprehensive genius. You discern barely a miraculous absence of qualities having a specific adaptation. You are quite sure he had no ill-timed idiosyncrasies, that would be prompting him to aim at conforming the world to any romantic ideal standard of his own. He bowed reverentially to authority. If he ever did anything contumaciously, it was when he believed what the Church believed. You judge that he would make no difficulty wherever placed. He would not wage war with existing institutions—unless indeed it chanced to be the fashion; and then if he could not restrain his shafts of wit, he would at least take care to let them fly, after the manner of a fire-wheel in pyrotechnics, as nearly as possible in the direction of every

radius successively in the whole circumference, so that all parties might fare alike. He would keep a well-behaved and gentlemanly conscience. He would have constitutional objections to having constitutional objections to anything. Under a monarchy he would be a loyal subject, in a republic a law-abiding citizen, in a revolution an adherent of all parties and none. In short, superadding to so goodly an assemblage of negative qualifications a nice instinct for his cue, such a man would be at his ease indifferently in any social, political, or ecclesiastical order whatever.

At a very small expense of ingenuity, one could assign him several exceedingly suitable niches in the temple of history. For instance, had he been permitted a spontaneous birth in patriarchal times, he would infallibly have been Jacob; and not Jacob himself wore the kid-skins to receive the blessing of his father with a more natural grace and a more appreciative humor, than Erasmus would have displayed in his place. The circumspect Gamaliel, it is safe to assume, did not exceed the pious gravity with which Erasmus would have pronounced his conservative advice to let the doctrine of the Nazarene alone. There is enough of truth in Coleridge's suggestion of a parallel between Erasmus and Voltaire, as to their method of attack, to render it not improbable that, in the eighteenth century and in France, Erasmus might have enlisted in the same service with Voltaire, wielding, with even a better instructed skill, the glittering fence of the Frenchman's infidel raillery. Still more naturally, perhaps, he would have found his way into Sydney Smith's parish, preaching worldly wisdom and a humane morality on Sunday, and alternately cracking jokes and feeding his flock with physic for the cure of their souls during the week.

Such, in outline, appears to us to have been the char-

acter of the *man* Erasmus of Rotterdam. The character of the *scholar* Erasmus will not be separated in discussion from his literary influence, which we reserve for consideration toward the close of the article. We proceed to verify and illustrate the views already stated.

It may be proper to premise that our information respecting Erasmus is principally derived from his own testimony. This testimony survives in the form of a voluminous correspondence, which, after making suitable allowance for its lack of genuine epistolary *negligé* and confidential privacies, may yet fairly be taken as affording, upon the whole, a tolerably trustworthy exponent of the writer's character. It is to our purpose, at any rate, to remark that such testimony will not be liable to the accusation of designed hostility. As serving to show what a singular diversity of country, of character, of social and civil position, and of ecclesiastical opinion was represented in this correspondence, we may mention that it comprises letters addressed to the Pope, to the Emperor, to Henry VIII. of England, to Cardinal Wolsey, to Sir Thomas More, to Colet, to Zwingle, to Luther, to Hutten, to Melancthon.

If the remark that Erasmus was by nature equally adapted to every situation requires to be limited at all, the reader of his letters will be tempted to claim the exception in behalf of that particular situation in which it happened to him to be actually placed. But this exception, we apprehend, is rather apparent than real. He may *appear* at times unsuited to his circumstances, but it is because we unconsciously misplace him in thought. The fact is, his life was cast in a period of most unwonted transition and flux. This period had been preceded by a comparatively permanent posture of things under the still unchallenged supremacy of

Rome. Another posture of things, less stable, it is true, yet having a certain character of permanency, emerged from it, commencing the era of a partially successful, because partial, Protestantism. Now our liability is unawares to project Erasmus upon the former, or else to draw him forward upon the ground of the latter. In either case he appears unsuited to his circumstances. But if we are careful to view him in proper connection with the universal fluctuation of the times, it will puzzle us to tell how his own part could have been in any respect more exquisitely harmonized.

We are far enough from meaning that Erasmus displayed any portion either of that instinct by which a man comprehends his occasions, or of that buoyancy by which he rises to their mastery. These both are exclusive credentials of a style of greatness clearly above the mark of Erasmus. Indeed no one can glance in the most cursory manner over his letters, and avoid the conviction that he was, to say the least, sadly unequal to his opportunities, if not even absolutely ignorant of them. His fortune had involved him in the movement of the most stupendous revolution in human history. He stood on the quaking theatre and in the immediate crisis of great events. He was confessed the most eminent man of letters in Europe; and it was a time when reputation for learning invested its possessor with a credit and authority in the eyes of princes little less than oracular. True, both by nature and by profession, he was *merely* a man of letters. True, likewise, it was the battles of religion and of political liberty, not those of literature, that were so tumultuously fighting. But all this was really little to the purpose. The fate of learning was vitally intertwined with that of religion and of freedom. It was impossible that their championships should be altogether separated. The reviver

of letters could not avoid being, to some extent, both a reformer of religion and a vindicator of liberty. It was in his power to be so to a very great extent.

So significantly did the occasion make its appeal to Erasmus.[1] To his general qualifications as a scholar, he superadded several almost curiously special preparations for rendering back a worthy response. He was well versed in the Scriptures, in patristic literature, and in the received theology, and had, moreover, as keen a perception as any man could have of the abuses in the Church. He thus enjoyed every accidental advantage for becoming the leading spirit of the Reformation. That he did not, is only a distinguished illustration of the insufficiency of adventitious circumstances to compensate for the absence of natural endowments. It affords a striking refutation of the vulgar fallacy that the accredited hero of a crisis is in reality nothing but its creature.

There was barely one safety for Erasmus in his situation. Luther saw this, and naïvely enough volunteered to mark out the course proper for him to pursue.[2] The monarch of literature declined to be instructed by the monk of Wittemberg. The feeling was certainly natural, but, as usual, Luther was right. If Erasmus had steadily and consistently refused all share in the Reformation, as a business too great for him, and had

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[1] One recalls the vivid Demosthenean *μόνον οὐχὶ λέγει φωνὴν αφιεἰς.*

[2] The letter in which this advice was conveyed is marked by Luther's characteristic sagacity, as also by a certain sturdy impudence which was part of that sagacity. It presents a whimsical mixture of real respect and unconcealed contempt for his illustrious correspondent, and is altogether well worthy of being studied for the characters of both Luther and Erasmus. It may be seen (in a German translation) at the close of Müller's "Life of Erasmus"—probably also in many other places which will occur to the reader.

exclusively devoted himself to his chosen and appropriate work of restoring letters, it was undoubtedly competent for him to lay posterity under a debt of gratitude, which they would delight to pay in unaffected admiration and respect, instead of compounding it, as they are now compelled to do in part, with mingled reproaches and regrets. Granted that this position of neutrality was difficult to maintain. It was not impossible. Reuchlin scarcely violated it. But an influence more importunate than the pressure of the times rendered it untenable for Erasmus. Among other mercurial traits of character strongly allying him to the Gallic type of nationality, the learned Dutchman had a somewhat flavorous infusion of vanity in his composition. He was wont to pride himself on his familiarity with great men. He could number dignitaries, spiritual and temporal, of every rank, among his friends. He corresponded with the Pope, with emperors, and with kings. He made his boast that he was permitted to remain covered, on one occasion, in conference with a cardinal—*a wonderful compliment* (such is his language) *from a man of his great dignity.* It was not wholly strange to him, we are assured, to receive letters from abroad, bearing no other direction than to the "Glory of Literature," the "Sun of Literature," or some similar magniloquent sobriquet. With a highly sensitive appreciation of these gratifying incidents, was it fair to expect that the great Erasmus would voluntarily abdicate his title to such distinguished consideration? But this he would virtually do by disappointing the applications of princes for advice in times of emergency. It was out of the question. They consulted him as an oracle—silence would compromise his reputation—he would adopt the expedient of returning truly oracular responses. Accordingly, he was either

profoundly ambiguous, or circuitously evasive. He attempted to tamper with the times, when the times were terribly in earnest, and refused to be tampered with. He employed a "sort of holy guile"—when nothing but the perpendicular truth could possibly serve him. He daubed with untempered mortar—when mortar the most obdurately tempered scarcely withstood the solvent stress of the elements. Of course his artifice failed.

Yet Erasmus was too discerning not to know that the Reformation was needed, and he seems, at times, to have recognized it as inevitable. The greater part of the learning of that day was ranged in its favor. Unquestionably his own spontaneous sympathies all moved in the same direction. There were occasionally, too, not doubtful omens of success. He was naturally willing to identify himself with the most enlightened cause, and by no means less so if it was likely to prove victorious. Still he affected great moderation. In his opinion, abuses should be exscinded gradually. Corruptions might better be healed without the probe. In short the Reformation, which every one could see was imperatively demanded, should be sought through a course of pacific and conciliatory measures. Luther said sarcastically that Erasmus was willing the Church should be reformed, but would have a century intervene between the successive steps. Meanwhile Erasmus was continually complaining of Luther's violence. Many of his doctrines, he acknowledged, could not be controverted. He was pressed to write against him. He said shrewdly: *Nothing is easier than to call Luther a blockhead—nothing less easy than to prove him one; at least so it seems to me.* Again, to some Popish agents, he said: "Luther is so profound a divine, that I do not pretend even to comprehend him thoroughly;

and so great a man, that I learn more from one page in his books than from all Thomas Aquinas." Elsewhere he even admits something "apostolical" in him at times. But eulogy of Luther, though he often uttered it under circumstances that preclude the suspicion of dissimulation, was the exception, not the rule, with Erasmus. His ordinary burden was Luther's want of mildness.

One does not need to go excessive lengths in defence of Luther's course, to feel a tingling of indignation at this unvarying refrain. It is hardly possible not to believe of such a man, that he belonged to that class of persons who are generously ready to applaud among the loudest what no one in his senses would think of censuring, but who lift up their hands in pious horror at the vehemence of advocacy by which alone, against unscrupulous falsehood and violence, the object of their applause could be successfully vindicated. Now, as for the exhortations to gentleness, which Erasmus was so fond of discoursing to Luther and his party, considered merely in the abstract, we do not see how anything could reasonably be objected to them. No doubt they were eminently evangelical. They would seem to have edified Hallam, with whom—calm, conservative, and as impartial as a man void of enthusiasm is probably capable of being—Erasmus was not less a favorite than Luther a special aversion. No one would seriously pretend that he could defend the truculence of Luther on abstract grounds. It may not even have been necessary as an expedient of policy to reassure himself, to alarm the Papists, and to inspirit his followers. But what, on the other hand, shall we say was the animating spirit of Erasmus in his godly hortatives? Can we allow it to have been the spirit of that Gospel from which he professed to draw his sanctions? An inspired

teacher of that Gospel plainly declares the heavenly wisdom to be first *pure—then* peaceable. But in the face of this prescribed precedence, Erasmus did not blush to avow that "such was his love of peace, truth itself would be displeasing to him accompanied with discord." It was furthermore particularly unfavorable to his reputation for genuine Christian charity, that he had no sooner committed himself in controversy with Luther, at a little later period, though in the most carefully guarded manner, than, exasperated by the rough handling of his unceremonious antagonist, he himself, the life-long preacher of tolerance and moderation, not only employed the most violent invective in rejoinder, but actually called on the Elector of Saxony to punish Luther, or at least to rebuke and muzzle him!

So anxious was Erasmus not to be found lagging in the rear of his age, and, at the same time, so cautious not to venture forward in advance of the Church, that he at length volunteered to transmit to Pope Adrian, who was an old school-fellow, the draft of a plan for effecting the requisite reforms.[1] He suggestively permitted to His Holiness the liberty to destroy his com-

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[1] There is not, so far as our investigation extends, now extant any complete copy of Erasmus's letter to Adrian. In the edition of his correspondence to which we have had access, it appears broken off in the midst of a sentence in which Erasmus was evidently recommending a general council. The mutilation is doubtless the result of the author's own timidity. We would here say, once for all, that we have not thought it worth while to encumber these pages with notes of reference to authorities. We have drawn our materials mainly from Jortin's "Life of Erasmus," which is little more than a crude digest of his letters. The well-known fidelity of Dr. Jortin, together with his affectionate tenderness for Erasmus, is a sufficient guaranty of his correctness in citation. We may, however, add that we have satisfied ourselves in many of the more important instances, by recourse to original sources.

munication immediately on reading it. It may be imagined how softly to such a correspondent as the Pope, such a man as Erasmus would touch on such a matter as the reformation of the Church. He even couched it under the form of suppressing Lutheranism. Yet all did not prevent Adrian from being gravely offended with his temerity. The incident—otherwise quite insignificant, for no one will be apt to suppose that there was anything either original or profound in the plan—is nevertheless instructive, as indicating the spirit that animated the Papal See. Under the sway of such intolerance, not only was a peaceable reform manifestly hopeless, but there can be little doubt that had the temporizing counsels of Erasmus prevailed to quell the spirit of schismatic Protestantism, he would himself have been one of the earliest to fall a victim to pontifical rage. It became him to remember that despots have been in all ages proverbially suspicious of their friends.[1]

The plan which was thus at once to purify the Church and to restore harmony, contemplated, we believe, an œcumenical council, to be composed of the most eminent ecclesiastical dignitaries, and the most pious and learned doctors in Europe. As if councils had not been proved worse than useless over and over again, the farce was to be re-enacted of a horde of usurpers meeting to deprive themselves of emoluments and prerogatives, to possess themselves of which they and a long line of predecessors had not stood at any possible crime!

But otherwise the plan of Erasmus was superficial and inadequate—we will say inadequate because super-

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"Ενεστι γάρ πως τοῦτο τῇ τυραννίδι
Νόσημα, τοῖς φίλοιςι μὴ πεποιθέναι.

ficial. Degeneracy and decay are naturally of sluggish growth. Their beginnings are concealed and insidious. Their subsequent advances, also, are by insensible though accelerated degrees. It is always thus when human institutions perish. Their recovery, however, is by a very different process. That is not begun—it is not carried on—in secret. Experience demonstrates that the progress of decay is never arrested without the occurrence of a crisis. Decadence never passes over into renewal by imperceptible gradations. The change cannot take place without the shock of a violent recoil. The projectile commences its return from the upper air by a noiseless and motionless transition. But it was not released from the grasp of the Briareus who draws all things to the centre, without a loud and vehement explosion. It was an utter false philosophy that led Erasmus to hope for a gradual and peaceful purification of the Church. No reform begun on such principles ever succeeded. We are confident that history would be ransacked in vain for the instance of any reform pushed to a successful issue, on a prospectus of negative or of exquisitely balanced measures. If there is any one thing settled in the philosophy of reform, that one thing is this: *you must be bold.* Action—action—action does not more complete the orator, than boldness—boldness—boldness furnishes the panoply of the reformer. Audacity is at once his safety and his success. He must promise something that men will call difficult—the more difficult the better, so it be possible, and worth a struggle. It may even be necessary sometimes, when once a temporary relaxation of wholesome jealousy has permitted the entrance of pernicious error—it may be necessary to sit still for years, and wait for its ripening development to furnish a justifying occasion for radical and extreme correctives. At all events,

a movement in reform, to be successful, must tend toward an object positive and important enough, and arduous too enough, to rouse a wide and lofty enthusiasm. One of the inspired passages of Milton's prose expresses it nobly:

> In times of opposition, when either against new heresies arising, or old corruptions to be reformed, this cool, unpassionate mildness of positive wisdom is not enough to damp and astonish the proud resistance of carnal and false doctors, then (that I may have leave to soar awhile as the poets use) ZEAL, whose substance is ethereal, arming in complete diamond, ascends his fiery chariot drawn with two blazing meteors, figured like beasts, out of a higher breed than any the zodiac yields, resembling two of those four which Ezekiel and St. John saw; the one visaged like a lion, to express power, high authority, and indignation; the other of countenance like a man, to cast derision and scorn upon perverse and fraudulent seducers: with these the invincible warrior, Zeal, shaking loosely the slack reins, drives over the heads of scarlet prelates, and such as are insolent to maintain traditions, bruising their stiff necks under his flaming wheels.[1]

Very different from the shuffling proposals of Erasmus was the policy by which Luther steered the Reformation through broadside and tempest. He knew the wisdom of assuming the tone and front of a dauntless, and even audacious hardihood. Perhaps he exceeded the demands of the emergency in this respect. He would not himself deliberately justify every intemperance of his conduct. But what was the difficulty of his part! It ill becomes any of the richly dowered heirs of the Reformation to subtract one iota from the just fame of its champions. It has been truly remarked, that men are too rare who are willing to take a Curtian leap for the weal of humanity, for us to diminish their number by bestowing a stinted and niggard gratitude upon them.

Much, however, as Erasmus loved praise, he loved

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[1] "An Apology for Smectymnuus."

ease more. His vanity would have been soothed by ecclesiastical preferment. It is impossible that a man who ran over with complacency at a complimentary reception from a cardinal, should not have been well pleased to wear a cardinal's hat. It is pretty certain that the dignity, once at least in his life, was within his reach. It is equally certain that he never claimed it. His modesty could not have sprung from contempt for the splendors of office. It can only be ascribed to dread of its cares. To be caressed by the great as a man of learning and wit, cost him no anxiety beyond the light one to approve himself a pliant and acceptable courtier. Even this, notwithstanding his marvellous facility, sufficed to afflict him with apprehensions that were absolutely ludicrous. To have *been* a cardinal!—but no one laughed more heartily at the idea than Erasmus himself.

It would perhaps be no stretch of charity to dignify Erasmus's love of ease by a more honorable name. He was certainly not indolent. His multifarious works of authorship and editorship effectually defend Erasmus against the accusation of idleness. His industry, in fact, was remarkable, even in that age, and among a people proverbial for their industry. His literary achievements were the envy of all his peers in the republic of letters, and may well excite the astonishment of a generation for whom it is something more than diversion merely to read tomes, which he wrote, in a language long deceased, with an idiomatic grace and vigor that it is scarcely exaggeration to say, with Stephen, would have surprised Cicero himself by the discovery of unconjectured capacities of expression. He was perpetually employed. The *intercisiva tempora*, which form such a ruinous leakage with most lives, he turned to golden account. The "Praise of

Folly," which he afterward wrote at Sir Thomas More's in nine days, was meditated and partly composed on horseback. Whenever he journeyed, his halts at inns were improved to secure in writing the thoughts and humors and fancies that occurred to him on the road. Such a man cannot justly be charged with fondness for ease. His love of ease was more truly love of leisure. Whatever drew him from the Muses was hateful to him. But name it which we will, love of ease or love of leisure, it was a disposition which fatally disqualified him for the part of a reformer. Addiction to studious quiet would unfit a man to lead in any reformation. Pre-eminently in a religious reformation, whose demands are intolerant of any considerable diversion of zeal.

Had Erasmus been far less ardently devoted to literary leisure than he was, the same eager vanity which, despite the absence of other qualities indispensable to a reformer, impelled him to engage in the Reformation, would with the presence of those qualities have prevented his succeeding. Another inspiration than vanity was required for the hero of that hour. The prophet who undertook to perform the work of Elijah, needed also to possess some portion of Elijah's power and spirit. But in addition to these two sources of weakness, he had yet another of the tribe of lighter vices, which in a still higher degree disqualified him for the apostleship of the Reformation. Erasmus was deeply deficient in moral courage. We now mention the capital fault of his character.

Strange to say, he made no scruple of openly displaying this deplorable nakedness. And yet, do we err in deeming moral courage an endowment of such consequence, that its presence shall confer an aspect of sublimity upon a character not otherwise lifted above mediocrity—while nothing but mental capacities the

most extraordinary can prevent its absence from impoverishing any character of every attribute of greatness? Bacon was great without it, it is true; but his mind was of a very different order from that of Erasmus. The mind of Bacon belonged to the limited number of those which men have agreed to consider greatest. It was profound, comprehensive, philosophical and original. It abounded in prophetic intuitions of truth, and exercised itself familiarly with the amplest generalizations. So rich in the rarest gifts of nature—yet how would the gift of moral courage have completed the equipment of this wonderful genius! The mind of Erasmus was an exquisite, an unequalled instrument for a scholar,—acquisitive, facile, keen, each in a remarkable degree,—but destitute alike of great profoundness, great comprehensiveness, great philosophical aptitude, and great originality. It had unusual capacities of discursive acquirement, and versatile use. But of all those characteristics for which we reserve the appellation *great*, it had not a single one. Wanting moral courage, Erasmus wanted everything. Learned, witty, amiable, charitable, affectionate, insincere, parasitic, timid, irresolute, evasive, vain — he had nothing truly great about him, unless it were his comprehensive littleness.

We remarked that Erasmus did not affect to conceal his lack of moral courage. True, he would at times attempt to disguise it under a show of Christian charity, prudent moderation, virtuous love of concord. Oftener, however, he was frank, and confessed his weakness—but it was then commonly with a sarcastic humor and skeptical levity, which too clearly betrayed the exceeding shallowness of his moral nature. To Dean Pace, of London, he expressed himself thus: "Even if Luther had written all in a pious spirit, it was no part of my

intention to peril my head for the sake of the truth. Not every man has firmness enough for a martyr; and I fear that if a tumult had arisen I should have imitated Peter." What a confession was this! Could a really sincere and noble nature have made it—without at least giving "signs of remorse and passion" for its own deficiency? But the confession was honest, however misbecomingly made; and his conduct nowhere rose superior to the spirit which prompted it.

It is beyond dispute that, with whatever aim, Erasmus had in fact contributed not a little to the success of the Reformation. It was a common remark, that Erasmus had laid the egg, and Luther hatched it. Something of that ineffable unconsciousness with which oftentimes quiet hens perform the process of incubation for strange offspring that they are unable afterward to recognize, must, we are bound to believe, have attended in this case the deposit of the egg. Erasmus never denied that he laid an egg, but insisted that it was a hen's egg, and that Luther had hatched it a very different bird. We must question the explanation. We shall persist in thinking it far more likely that Erasmus himself mistook the species of the germ, than that the regular law of development suffered any interruption. His theory, however, will serve us as a hint by which to interpret his interference in the Reformation.

Erasmus was a wit and a satirist. In spite of his loyalty to the Church, his sense of the ludicrous was quite too lively not to be impressed with the gross incongruities that deformed her aspect. Especially the monastic institution attracted his Democritan eye. Doubtless the unhappy part of his parents' history, and the sad experience of his own much-abused youth, helped him in no slight degree to the estimate which he formed of the system. He has recorded in his

serious writings his mature conviction, that let its original object have been what it might, its practical workings were fraught with evil. The only thing he learned to hate with perfect hatred was the monks. Their grotesque attire, their solemn deceits, their absurd ignorance, their squalid zeal, their vile gluttony, made them most admirable subjects of satire. He lost no opportunity, seasonable or unseasonable, of turning them to ridicule. In conversation, in his letters, in his "Adages" amid learned philological comment, even in his "Greek Testament" amid pious exegesis, he never forgot the monks. But most effectually in his "Colloquies," and his "Praise of Folly," he pilloried them for the inextinguishable laughter of Europe.

All unconsciously he had been aiming a blow at not only the most vulnerable, but likewise the most vital part of Popery. To the extraordinary serviceableness of the religious orders, the Popes owed both the founding and the upholding of their supremacy. Erasmus, to be sure, was not first to bring these into popular discredit, but no one had done it so thoroughly well before. It is much to be lamented that, in so useful a service, he should have been actuated rather by hatred of the monks, than by love of true religion. Certain it is, that his truly valuable contributions to the aid of the best cause, must be credited, not to the excellence of his intentions, but to the overruling providence of God. Else why should he afterwards have wished to recede?

His *bon mots* at the expense of the Church, which it was as impossible for the hearer not to repeat as it was for him not to utter, usually made the tour of Europe, everywhere awakening attention to the prevailing disorders, and sowing the seeds of freer thought. His critical labors on the Greek Testament, in which

he was pioneer when there is said to have been but one copy in Germany, at the same time created new facilities, and kindled new zeal for the study of God's Word — while his learned editions of the Christian Fathers opened the renovating fountains of an earlier and more uncorrupt interpretation. It is not easy to overrate the quickening influence of these two classes of writing on the nascent Reformation. But that he himself had no deeper design in the one, than to exercise his wit and gratify his spleen, or in the other, than to do an acceptable work of professional scholarship, is proved by his subsequent conduct. Evidently he little suspected what a ruin he was precipitating. "Who," he writes, "could have foreseen this horrible tempest?" When the train which he had ignited with a merry laugh reached the "combustible and fuelled entrails" of the Papacy, and the whole world began to rock, nothing could exceed his consternation. He behaved like a boy who has thoughtlessly put a match to a parcel of dry leaves to enjoy a bonfire, and who runs frightened away when he sees the building wrapped in flames. He had amused himself by casting firebrands, and the serious business of the rest of his life was to convince men that he had been in sport. Unable to endure the aspect of his offspring, he "fled, and cried out, *Death*."

It was entirely suitable for such a man to conclude that it was all over with Luther, when Leo fulminated his famous bull against him. While the latter was lighting a bonfire with the pontifical thunder in the public square at Wittemberg, Erasmus wrote to Noviomagus: "Would to God he had followed my counsels! It would be no great matter that one man should perish; but if these people [the monks] should get the better, they will never rest till they have ruined litera-

ture." Here speak in curious conjuncture at once his vanity, his timidity, his want of magnanimity, his hatred of the monks, and his concern for literature. The last sentiment is really the key to his character and career. It is the one thing which gives them their only consistency. Erasmus was a typical scholar. Good literature was the "master light of all his seeing." Were his fame simply that of a scholar, no scholar's fame would be more desirable. But the character of the scholar is mainly identical with the character of his works. We shall remark upon this influence presently.

It can affect one anxious to judge charitably of his species, with no feeling but one of unmixed mortification, to meet the evidences, which Erasmus has immortalized in his correspondence, of his own lack of manliness. Œcolampadius was the mildest of reformers. He had enjoyed an unusual share of the intimacy of Erasmus. The latter had lavished upon him every token of regard. But Œcolampadius, following the lead of Luther, went a step beyond his more prudent friend, and forfeited the smile of the dominant hierarchy. In the prosecution of his evangelical labors, he introduced the name of Erasmus in a commentary on Isaiah, styling him "our great Erasmus." On occasion of this, Erasmus, his cowardice for the moment overcoming his vanity, found it in his heart to write his old friend in the following pitiful strain of deprecation: "I consider what several great men think of you, the Emperor, the Pope, Ferdinand, the King of England, the Bishop of Rochester, Cardinal Wolsey, and many others, whose authority it is not safe for me to despise, and whose favor it is not prudent for me to throw away."

Ulrich von Hutten was a nobleman, a scholar, and a wit. He shared largely in the authorship of the "*Epis-*

tolæ Obscurorum Virorum," one of the boldest and most effective satires of the times. He has been called the "Knight of the Reformation." His ruling passion was for political liberty, as that of Erasmus was for learning. They were about equally religious; but Hutten was as impulsive, chivalrous, and daring, as Erasmus was calculating, petty, and timid. Both incidentally coadjutors of Luther in the Reformation, each made a characteristic mistake as to the method proper to be pursued. Hutten took the sword; Erasmus bound himself up in compromises. Their fate is full of instruction. Hutten was proscribed, forsaken by his friends, persecuted by his enemies, hunted to death—but from first to last continued to be feared, and has never ceased to be respected. Erasmus, courted, despised, distrusted, was so gratifyingly successful in his course of deception, that the coryphæus of Protestantism, with a peculiarly mordant emphasis, warned his followers to beware of Erasmus, "that viper," and a Catholic doctor of Constance had a portrait of him hung up in his study, where he might spit in his face as often as he pleased. Not long before his melancholy end, Hutten, discovering his error too late, thus expresses himself to Luther (we quote from memory): "Oh man of God! Thy work is of God, and will endure—mine is of man, and will perish." Erasmus calls his own life an Iliad of evils. He was accused of sixty thousand heresies by Stunica to the Pope, and threatened with libels by the Lutherans. "Thus I stand," are his words, "deserving well of all, ill used by both parties."

At the nadir of his fortunes, Hutten, an outlaw and a fugitive, visited Basle, and sought an interview with Erasmus. What magnanimity can we admit to have remained in a man who, from a paltry and selfish fear,

could refuse this simple proof of friendship to an old correspondent and a brother scholar, under such pathetic circumstances?

It is really striking to observe by what degrees of difference men separate from each other, with respect to the single endowment of moral courage. A moral hero and a moral poltroon cannot but be insoluble enigmas to each other. They are polar opposites, precisely — sundered by the "whole diameter of being." No wonder Erasmus was incapable of comprehending the glorious audacity of Luther. Moral courage might well enough, perhaps, be analyzed into the two elements of *honesty* and *strength of will.* Happy would it have been for Erasmus if he had possessed a considerable share of either. That he had small strength of will was not his fault; but he might have been honest. Honesty, to be sure, was not by itself sufficient to make him the hero of the Reformation; but it was sufficient to make him, what to himself was of infinitely greater consequence, a good Christian. To spurn the spell of ancient and venerable authority, wielding the arm of earthly omnipotence, and speaking with the voice of God, demanded the presence of moral courage in the utmost strength and union of both its elements. Honesty, even adorned with illustrious genius and learning, could not attain unto it. It asked, also, for a great free will, that dared to be its own—that hoary Prejudice could not seduce, or reverend Prescription awe, or absolute Power enslave.

One brave rally in opposition—a single stand, made somewhere by some one, as defiant and unflinching as the attitude of Rome was lofty and threatening, and the Reformation was secure. No matter though Rome looked on the whole world subdued—

Praeter atrocem animum Catonis,

the unsubdued spirit of *one* Cato was enough to break the universal charm of servile compliance. Everything depended on a leader that would *never* falter. Rome had conquered by ages of sublime assumption. She would yield only to a courage stanch enough to set it utterly at naught. Asked Melancthon, "How much shall we concede to Rome?" "NOTHING," was Luther's reply. At such magnificent defiance the Imperial Lady was drunk with the wine of astonishment. One instant she reeled with a sudden and insupportable stupor. That instant Luther "struck, and firmly, and one stroke." She recovered immediately—but already the Reformation was history.

The sixteenth century trembles with the play of a thousand colliding forces. The field of the Reformation is thus filled with so much to assail the external sense of the spectator, that, without especial care, he is very likely to miss the secret moral element which really wrought most powerfully of all in the breasts of the principal Protestant champions. In the case of Luther—as the example intrinsically best for our purpose, and the most familiarly known—while it was, no doubt, nobly done to scorn the splendid prizes of the service of Rome, even more nobly to brave her threats of earthly vengeance, still these fall vastly short of exhausting either the nature or the strength of his temptation. Any honest man could have done the former—indeed, mere love of leisure enabled Erasmus to do it, without an excessive amount of honesty; and the latter was not beyond the virtue of a stoic, or of a North American Indian. Rome held a resource of intimidation unspeakably more formidable to such as Luther. Full certainly was he to learn, that he who aspired to the true and perfect mastery of that hour, must press to his lips a cup of far more exceeding bitterness. It was his part

to prove that moral courage might yet try the steadiness of its eye, by looking a still more appalling danger in the face.

Dungeon, and torture, and death, however we may think of them, are not the most dreadful of human evils. Innumerable times they have been laughed to scorn. They have no force in them to shake the constant mind. They may seal the lips of a weak-willed man, or turn a dishonest man's utterance into a lie, as they did Galileo's —but they cannot change his opinion. The muttered "But it does move though" will still attest the inaccessible mind. And holding his opinions with undoubting confidence, a merely honest man, if he be *really* honest, can easily go to martyrdom for them, as he would to victory. For physical suffering, however formidable, at least has a limit. This attempered frame is not immortal, and pain is no infirmity of the desolated clay. When it has killed the body, it has no more that it can do. It was the divine foreknowledge of a destined release in time, that nerved the endurance of the deathless Prometheus. The terror is almost too oppressive for sublimity, when finite patience proposes to exhaust interminable woe. Yet the Catholic mother threatened no less an alternative to her apostate children. With a mortal hand she brandished a sword of retribution that flamed along the whole limitless track of their inevitable immortality. Prometheus, his purpose in him remaining as steadfast as the pole, could not unwisely hurl a haughty defiance at Jupiter, from the blasted cliff of his banishment and chains—safely might he consent to feel the drunk earth reel under him on the seething sea, and smile with victorious serenity as he went down to

Visit the bottom of the monstrous world—

for he knew that Fate had assigned a termination of his

toils. So Hutten, who was constituted without one particle of that deep religious sense of the supernatural which breathed a hush of mysterious awe over the soul of Luther, and made his ear quick to hear voices across from the unseen world — who possessed no capacity which could have been educated to comprehend the meaning of spiritual authority, and for whom, consequently, Rome had no terrors but the physical — the chivalrous and honest, but unsusceptible Hutten treated the Pope with contempt, as a matter of course. Unfathomably deeper stirred the sea in Luther's bosom. If any one has imagined that by some rare felicity of fortune, Luther reached the region of "calm weather," without first traversing a zone of tempest, let him turn to the account given by the Reformer himself, of his own inward struggle, before he determined on burning the bull of Leo.

It is when the soul feels itself alone against all men, and yet is formed with a yearning susceptibility for submission to authority—when it stands naked and afraid in the conscious presence of the powers of the world to come, and under the sombre shadow of ETERNITY — and more, when its own very honesty and solicitude for the right perplex it with the fear of being wrong — wrong after all, where a mistake would be fatal, making the heart like water—it is then, if ever, that you may look to see the "native hue of resolution" blanch, and the eye quail. Precisely such was Luther's temptation, and so he gained his victory. It is shallow to say that confidence, like that which he finally won, of being right, would have sustained almost any man as it sustained him. That was the very hinge of the crisis in his mind. It was *the being sure that he was right*—unshaken, not certainly against the dread of extreme torture, but against the mind-

overawing menace of spiritual authority, which, for ten centuries and more, had heard no challenge, no protest, nothing but the long echo of its own solitary voice — aye, the high, self-centred confidence that he was right—that, *that* was the victory.

The element which was thus the secret strength of Luther's strife, seems not to have so much as touched either Hutten or Erasmus. The one escaped it, as if by the bluntness of his physical courage—the other, as if by the subtlety of his littleness—both, it may be, by their want of genuine piety.

Whether, upon the whole, Erasmus was at heart really a Christian or not, is a question which, after some balancing of the testimony on both sides, we confess ourselves unable satisfactorily to answer. Calling to mind our Savior's declaration, that whosoever was not for him was against him, the reader perhaps will feel that hesitation to decide is, in such a case, almost equivalent to an adverse decision. And we will not deny it. D'Aubigné, with that beautiful charity which sheds such an indescribable charm over his history of the Reformation, inclines apparently to a favorable opinion. But it is only by mildly insinuating that the mental gloom which clouded the close of Erasmus's life, was doubtless due, in part, to the loss of those spiritual consolations which are commonly bestowed upon the faithful and strenuous asserter of the truth. He certainly was not intellectually ignorant, nor apparently in intellectual doubt of salvation by grace. Better statements of the doctrine of justification by faith were hardly constructed by Luther himself, than may be found in Erasmus. Zwingle, Œcolampadius, and other leading Protestants, acknowledged a deep indebtedness to him for their first true apprehensions of the "truth as it is in Jesus." There are not wanting, in his let-

ters and elsewhere, passages breathing so fresh and sweet an evangelical spirit, that citing them here, we should induce the reader to wonder how we could dare call the author's piety at all in question. Take, for instance, the following—and we are nowise sure that a much more favorable one might not be selected:

> The sum of all Christian philosophy is this: to place all our hopes in God alone, who by his free grace, without any merit of our own, gives us everything through Christ Jesus; to know that we are redeemed by the death of his Son; to be dead to worldly lusts; and to walk in conformity with his doctrine and example, not only injuring no man, but doing good to all; to support our trials patiently in the hope of a future reward; and finally, to claim no merit to ourselves on account of our virtues, but to give thanks to God for all our strength and for all our works. This is what ought to be instilled into man until it becomes a second nature.

Sentiments so pious and just, we are, at first, much more than willing to believe, must have been the genuine overflowings of a well within the man, springing up into everlasting life. But then, again, when we find him repelling an accusation insinuated against his chastity, by the plea that the scholar's vocation was too busy to admit the diversions of love, and that if perchance in youth his desires might have burned beyond the control of continence, *age*, he was thankful, had finally repressed those excessive ardors;[1] when we come to this, in sorrowful perplexity, we are compelled to ask, "Can such a man, after all, have been acquainted in heart with the spiritual morality of the Sermon on the Mount?" No reference to the restraints and sanc-

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[1] See Bayle's Biog. Dict., Art. Erasmus, Note EE, where the finical Hollander's apology finds apt complement and illustration in passages cited from Ovid's "*De Remedio Amoris*," and kindred classic inspirations. The lively Frenchman's curious learning obeys, in this instance, a rare spirit of appreciative sympathy.

tions of religion — no sigh of remorse for remembered transgressions? Dilettanteism, in its worst modern sense, is not too offensive a word to characterize such abjectness. Imagine the burst of gospel indignation with which Milton would have spurned, recall that with which he did spurn, a like innuendo.

There undoubtedly are some natures so light and thin, as absolutely to afford no anchorage for strong convictions. From these it would be unphilosophical to require that positive and profound experience of religious verities, which is necessary to accredit the piety of natures more massive and solid. We incline to rank Erasmus rather with the former class. And yet he does not seem to have been wholly incapable of sincerity. No one, we presume, ever thought of questioning the sincerity of his devotion to literature—any more than any one ever thought of questioning the sincerity of Luther's devotion to the doctrines of the Reformation. The poor student, who expended his pittances of money, "first for Greek books, then for clothes" — the dependent scholar, whose prevailing sentiment was not extravagantly expressed, when he wrote to a friend, "*And without letters what is life?*" —needs no vindication from the accusation of insincerity. But does not such evident capacity of sincerity entitle us to look for a tolerably tenacious grasp of definite beliefs in religion? The fact seems to be, that his sincerity in letters was like the Catholic sincerity of James II., which—as has been pointedly observed—made him insincere in all but that. More than once he gives utterance to regret that so promising a youth as Melancthon was lost to literature. Fortunate for the Church that Melancthon was already secure within the powerful attraction of Luther's governing spirit! Fortunate, we will add, for Melancthon himself, though

his subordination, at once necessary and voluntary, did prove irksome at times.

Christianity certainly exacts from her disciple no more than his all of sincerity—but, on the other hand, no less than that all will suffice her. Did Erasmus yield his all? We have seen what was the measure of his sincerity in literature—one or two citations shall serve to show whether he had as much to offer upon the sacrifice and service of his religious faith. To a Lutheran nobleman of Bohemia he wrote in these words: "If things come to extremities, and the Church totters on both sides, I will fix myself upon the solid rock until a calm succeeds, *and it be apparent which is the Church.*" To Pirckheimerus: "I could be of the opinion of the Arians and Pelagians, if the Church had approved their doctrines! . . . There is nothing wherein I acquiesce more securely, than in the assured judgments of the Church. Of reasonings and arguments there is no end." To Melancthon he speaks of Rome as the "Popish sect"—to Romanists as the "Catholic Church." To Viglius Zuichem, in communication with the Reformers, he commends the prudence of the dying man who was catechized by the Devil. He (as Erasmus relates) in mortal fear of being caught in a heresy, to the question, "What do you believe?" replies, "What the Church believes;" pushed with "What does the Church believe?" rejoined, "What I believe;" and finally, being fairly enclosed by the question put once more, "And what do you believe?" closed the circle of defence by answering again, "What the Church believes."

The religious faith of such a man cannot have been more than passive acquiescence in the general spirit of the age. The acquiescence itself was hardly complete enough always to conceal some slight reserve of skepti-

cism. If, in connecting the names of Erasmus and Sydney Smith at the commencement of this article, we were unjust to either, no one will hesitate to pronounce which suffered the injustice.

Not for lack of matter, but for lack of space, we here close our discussion of the character of Erasmus. We have illustrated it principally from his connection with the Reformation, because it was principally that which enabled him to display so fully the complement of his peculiar qualities. We have been severe, we admit; but readers have never wanted opportunity to judge for themselves whether the severity were just. We arraign his criminal weaknesses—not because we are by any means insensible to the singularly potent fascination of perennial freshness and ever-modern brilliancy that guards the treasure of his fame—but because we believe it to be for the interests of virtue that illustrious meanness should invariably be made the gazing-stock of history. It is eminently proper that men who, like Erasmus, from selfishness or fear, are deaf to the invitation of great opportunities, should at least be forced to teach by warning, a fidelity and magnanimity which they refuse to teach by example.

Macaulay has exercised his unrivalled ability as a literary advocate in constructing an elaborate and ingenious extenuation of Machiavelli's atrocious morality, by transferring in part the guilt of the individual to the country and age. No similar plea can be admitted in mitigation of the sentence which we must all agree in pronouncing on Erasmus; he stands in merciless contrast with too many contemporary instances of eminent virtue. Considerations there are, however, admissible to be pleaded in his case, of a different nature, but not at all, we believe, less exculpatory. We only regret that the encroaching dimensions of the previous discus-

sion forbid our presenting them as much at length as we should be glad to do.

It is a mistake to suppose that Erasmus deliberately elected to be the man that he was. Far from it. He yielded to the persuasion of circumstances which, with his measure of moral strength, it was almost hopeless to resist when he became the habitual time-server. From first to last his fortune was his faithful preceptress in the arts of deceit. He was not more apt to learn than she industrious to teach. Born an illegitimate child, and thus early tempted by such peculiar encouragements to duplicity as must necessarily attend the neglected and insulted childhood of illegitimacy; an orphan at thirteen, and the ward of guardians who executed their sacred trust by exhausting the resources of menace and deceit, to secure the resisting boy within convent walls, that they might enjoy his patrimony; over-persuaded at length by a former school-mate to enter as a canon regular, and spending several wretched years where his fatal talent for dissimulation[1] was forced

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[1] A tradition survives connected with this portion of Erasmus's experience, so happily illustrative of the "other side" of godly cloister life, and at the same time so perfectly characteristic of the man himself, that it deserves at least to be commemorated in a note. It seems that there stood on the convent grounds a pear-tree, the fruit of which soothed the palate of the Superior, as fruit of no other pear-tree could aspire to do. Erasmus, who had a wide range of appreciation for delicate sapors (fish he eschewed—his 'stomach' was 'Lutheran') conjectured that possibly this fruit might develop a point of contact with his own appetite. Accordingly, in spite of the Abbot's prohibition, covering himself under the morning twilight, for several days he knew the flavor of the favorite pears. But the Abbot was jealous, and one morning the depredator heard an ominous bustle among the brethren below. Certain that the dusk and the foliage had not yet betrayed his identity, he slid quietly down and scampered off, imitating the halting gait of a certain lame brother. This poor monk, discovered, as was sup-

to daily exercise in self-defence against sanctimonious villainy; escaping to run the career of the zealous but destitute student, who purchased with his chance gifts of money "first Greek books, and then clothes;" the life-long scholar, whose very existence, while performing his matchless services to literature, depended on his success in paying court to the great—he passed his whole life in a school, in which it was his only fault that he profited too well. All these circumstances were not a whit less influential for having acted on their subject three hundred years ago. Doubtless they moulded him as really as we see circumstances moulding men continually now. It may indeed be true that he would have held the height of virtue had he conquered his fate; but certainly he did not explore the depth of baseness in confessing its power. Comprehensively surveying his career, we may well let our wonder that with such noble occasions he accomplished so little, give way to wonder that, with such hostile temptations, he accomplished so much.

A master delineator of human life has condensed the character and misfortune of a Roman Emperor into these pregnant words: "*Omnium consensu capax imperii nisi imperasset.*" He certainly owes a large debt of pious gratitude to Providence, who, in taking his farewell of life, remembers no occasion when he stood in the awful presence of a responsibility that abashed him with the token of its own superiority. Let one but

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posed, by his limp, suffered a severe punishment before the eyes of Erasmus, whose sense of justice was doubly conquered by his love of fun and love of impunity.

This tradition has been brought into doubt by some, though without good reason, as far as we can see. It has strong internal evidence, at least; but if we adopt the mythical theory, the genesis of the narration, we presume, is not obscure.

have fortunately fulfilled what his various positions expected, and he may rest in perfect security that

> Aftertime,
> And that full voice which circles round the grave,

will sing a thousand songs of yet nobler powers, that waited in vain for worthy opportunities of exercise. Far otherwise fares it with the man whose pathway leads him into the shadow of some great responsibility, which fairly overtops his utmost stature. All is thenceforth the intensest reality. His dimensions are exactly computed, not in figures of rhetoric, but in figures of arithmetic. Imagination no longer delights herself with the fiction of magnificent possibilities, and history recording his successes, defines them with his failures.

A sentiment kindred with the Latin historian's has all along, we confess, been inspired by the haunting genius of Erasmus. The misfortune of Galba was his also—he attempted affairs that proved too great for him. It is easy now to imagine how his horoscope might have been cast with a thousand conjunctures that would illustrate the biography of his age with a very different Erasmus. He cannot, to be sure, maintain that the times made him what he was—nor even that they represent him untruly; but he may with justice complain that they represent him too faithfully. They were "times that *tried* men's souls." No one who was worth looking at could hope to escape being known. It was all one "gaudy, babbling, and remorseless day," that blazoned the characters of men with perfectly indiscriminate illumination. No beauty and no deformity was permitted to lurk in the shade. It will be apparent to every one that had Erasmus fallen on more quiet days, he might have surrendered himself wholly to the behoof of letters, winning the grateful

and delighted admiration of mankind—and no one, except a private circle of acquaintances (with whom the secret would die), have been able to guess that his character was compounded of so many frailties. He might then even have been thought capable of being a reformer.

The personal presence of Erasmus, portrayed so vividly on canvas that it seems suspended from no function of life but speech, still continues, we believe, to share a silent part among the living, in more than one of the masterpieces of Holbein. The traits of the countenance seem well to agree with the facts of his biography. A general appearance of kindliness, upheld by a very patent but not at all unamiable self-complacency, overspreads the features. This is reconciled with a *caveat* of irony and insincerity, induced upon the whole cast of the countenance, but especially legible in the doubtful sparkle of the eye, and the ambiguous undulation of the lip. The forehead is concealed by a cap, but the eyebrow is slightly lifted, as if with habitual endurance of pain, into a curve which has registered itself in two lightly penciled wrinkles. A ruffling of the skin, just outward from the eye-socket, perhaps produced by involuntary nervous contraction in suffering, stands for ratification of the handwriting on the brow. The eye itself, poised in an expression hesitating between coyness and banter, retires half for cover, half for *reconnoissance*, and twinkles merrily out, from underneath lashes curling tensely backward, with a dancing light, which, after all, did not finally prove quite victorious over a resting shadow of sadness. The large nose holds a language of benevolence, until its sharpened tip suddenly apprises you of wit that might, upon tempting occasion, work deceitfully like a razor. The lips below meet in that wavering articular line which

so often indicates weakness and indecision, relieved, if not redeemed, by the presence of gentle sympathies, ready tact, genial appreciation, radiant good-nature—in a word, of all the qualities of an excellent companion. Their expression must have been as fickle as an April sky. All this time we have not escaped the influence of an indescribable serio-comic air of sanctimony, partly native, partly a matter of conscious humor, which we are sure this remarkable visage never wholly forgot. In short, with the help of imagination, and some knowledge of his character and biography, we can trace here all that amiableness, that vanity, that versatility, that fickleness, that humorousness, that insincerity, that gayety, that sensitiveness, that good sense, that policy, that easy Epicureanism, that apprehensive forecast, that enjoyment of life, that experience of suffering, which are forever inseparable from this unique personage in history—Erasmus of Rotterdam.

Thus much of Erasmus the *man.* We turn for a moment to the *scholar* Erasmus, with an unaffected sense of relief.

If sterner words are expected by justice from the historian of religion, the historian of literature [1] would have been obviously wrong had he foreborne to declare that no other name sheds such lustre on his country and age as the name of Erasmus. We join our grateful assent. We are heartily glad to record, that in his literary fame we detect the presence of scarce an alloy. We instinctively choose henceforth to believe that in the scholar, and not in the man, we have found our true Erasmus. It is in this character that, with a benediction not less for the sake of mankind than for his own, we would commend him to immortality.

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[1] Hallam.

We have reserved to ourselves little room, save for mere generalities, in speaking of his literary influence; but it may be expected that we should say something of his relation to the Greek Testament. This we do with a consciousness that, in the view of those whose acquaintance with the subject is superficial, we may seem to be qualifying rather than heightening our eulogy. The truth is, the text of the New Testament owes the least possible to the critical labors of Erasmus. He may properly enough be called the pioneer in the work—though the idea of his edition appears to have originated with his publisher, Froben, who applied to him for his services, instead of with himself; but he had not the good fortune to forestall the improvements of several hundred years, as in similar cases pioneers have sometimes almost done. Indeed, he failed apparently to conjecture what notable opportunity for the display of diligent scholarship the undertaking afforded. Obedient to the importunity of his calculating publisher, he dispatched the business—recension, paraphrase, commentary, supervision of the press—all in eight months, besides forwarding an edition of Jerome already in hand. He says himself, "*Praecipitatum fuit verius quam editum.*" His materials were exceedingly defective, consisting of four incomplete MSS., with a "manuscript of Theophylact, containing the Greek Text and his Commentary on the Gospels, Acts and Epistles." These circumstances were quite sufficient to account, without dishonor to Erasmus, for the unsatisfactory character of his first edition. But had he conceived adequately of the importance of his enterprise, he would assuredly have exerted himself, as there is no evidence that he ever did, better to approve his learning and fidelity in subsequent editions. Notwithstanding every deduction, however, that candor requires to be

made, the praise of Erasmus for his services to the New Testament cannot be otherwise than very great. His fifth edition—by the simple authority, as it would seem, of his illustrious name, furnishing the basis of what is commonly known as the Received Text—has continued, down to a recent date, to exercise a commanding influence on every succeeding re-issue of the Greek Testament. "The past at least is secure." Nothing can by any peradventure rob Erasmus of the renown which attaches to the man whose privilege it was to give the first sight of the original Greek of the New Testament to the learned eyes of the sixteenth century.

His flexile genius, his varied learning, his Attic taste, his refined wit, his shrewd good sense, his nice tact, his unwearying industry,—above all, his liberal spirit,—remarkably anticipated in themselves, by several centuries, a state of elegant culture, which they also contributed largely to realize. A recluse scholar among men of the world, and a man of the world among recluse scholars, he may be considered the earliest of that succession of interpreters between high education and the masses of the people, who have already done so much toward making education popular, and the people educated. To him belongs the honor of first worthily inaugurating the art of critical classic editorship. From seed thus modestly deposited, has sprung the whole modern science of philology, which is bearing such magnificent fruit before our eyes. Enough has been implied in preceding pages of this article, to indicate the contemporary estimation in which he was held. No man was ever equally an autocrat in the world of letters; and because his autocracy was exercised as beneficially for the world of letters, as the Czar Peter's was for Russia, no man can ever become so again. Fortunate in the moment of his advent as a

scholar, he has impressed the modern literary age, as an early legislator impresses a rising state. His influence lives through all the influence of the Revival of Learning. It will enjoy a fresh reprieve from decay in every generous result which that great event has rendered possible.